

# THE CORNHILL MAGAZINE.

SEPTEMBER 1894.

## *A FATAL RESERVATION.*

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### BOOK II.

#### CHAPTER I.

Who much of marriage thought, and much amiss,

‘WELL, this will be our last season in town, so my advice to you is to make the most of it in every way.’

These momentous words were spoken by Mrs. Nixon at breakfast one morning towards the end of April, nearly five years after the events with which the close of the last book was occupied. It was to her three daughters she was speaking, and they accepted their mother's words in the only sense which was possible—namely, that as the next was to be their last season in London, they must make the most of it in that one all-important way which would tend to relieve the intolerable burden of their mother's pecuniary embarrassments.

Mrs. Nixon lived with her three daughters at the Oaks, a rambling unmanageable old house standing in a vacant park, whose trees covered it from the outer world, rendering it very private, or very dreary, according to one's point of view. A broad avenue wound from the lodge gates to the front of the house, a side road branching off to the spacious stables. The gates stood always open, for having judiciously buried their bottom bars in the gravel for the support which their hinges had ceased to afford them, they were now established beyond the possibility of movement. Visitors to the Oaks had once driven under a coat of arms decorating the massive

stone portals with all the glory of blue and gold. But inexorable Time had laid his hand upon this fair token of good family; and the paint having been washed away by the rain of years, the iron bars were now covered with a thick red rust. The long avenue bore the same marks of neglect. Little blades of green were peeping tentatively above the well-worn gravel, while, on either side, the tall rank grass, amongst which showed the roots of the elm trees, declared a long immunity from the scythe. Stables and coach houses were alike empty and desolate, only one mare and a brougham being left to support the honour and dignity of the family.

The house itself confirmed the impression of its surroundings. A somewhat unpromising front door opened into a large paved hall, which, however, was not unimposing in its way, its walls being hung with savage implements, with lances, swords, battle-axes, and other weapons of the past, enshrouded in cobwebs of almost equal antiquity. The chief features of the dining-room, where the party was gathered at breakfast, were the number and gloominess of the portraits on the walls, the solidity and sparsity of the furniture, and the shabbiness of its covering. A heavily mullioned and transomed window, ornamented at the top with three coats of arms in dark stained glass, occupied the end of the room opposite to which was the door, while through two other windows, decorated in the same way, the sun, when it came, would reveal the dust on the red sash of the general over the fireplace. The curtains and the carpet were alike faded and worn, seeming to have known a better day; while in the massive beam that crossed the ceiling was a large black hook which, according to the second Miss Nixon, a prolonged stay at the Oaks invested with a peculiar fascination.

If we turn from topography to biography, we shall find that at the age of eighteen Mrs. Nixon had married a certain captain of the —th Hussars, by whom she had been the mother of three daughters and a son, of whom the three daughters, aged respectively twenty-three, twenty-two, and twenty, were sitting at breakfast with their mother on this particular morning; and the son, after walking in the footsteps of his father for seventeen years, had followed him, at an interval of only a few months, to another world, the same white tablet in the village church commemorating the posthumous virtues of both. Captain Nixon had been famous as the best player at pool and whist in his regiment;

Philip Nixon, his son, had been known as the best bat and the biggest bully in his school. The death of the former was commonly attributed by the creditors of the family to *delirium tremens*. His son had died from a chill caught, as was not generally known, from sitting in his wet clothes in a public-house when it was supposed that he was running in a paper-chase. His sisters were only beginning to recover from their loss as the prospect of another London season brightened before them, for his untimely death at the beginning of the previous year, following so quickly upon that of their father, had compelled them to remain in the country during the precious months from May to July.

Mrs. Nixon's marriage had been the one indiscretion of her life; she never ceased to wonder at the folly of her youthful passion. It was not that Captain Nixon had been a poor man; he was only one whose expenses had had an unfortunate trick of seldom being in exact ratio to his income. However much circumstances had increased his means, he had found that it made no appreciable difference in his debts. And when, after many years of impatient waiting for the death of an uncle, who had shown a want of consideration for his nephew in preferring to live, he had come into the Oaks, he had found himself a considerably poorer man than before, inasmuch as the greater part of that fine property passed into the hands of gentlemen in the city, and so the goose was killed whose golden eggs had lined the luxurious little nest in Mayfair. If Mrs. Nixon had married more judiciously she would probably not have moved in better society, nor have lived in greater luxury; but she would not have been subject to the humiliation of cajoling tradesmen she had no intention of paying, nor to the degradation of making bargains for what she could not afford to buy. Her husband's little weaknesses had not caused her much inconvenience, for they had early adopted the golden rule of mutual non-interference, and whenever for any reason she had not cared to see him, she had resorted to the simple plan of avoiding him—a plan full of advantages for both of them.

Nature had been considerate to the three sisters, and had made the eldest the fairest, if it be not a contradiction to speak of the 'fairest' where dark hair and pregnant dark eyes were the predominant characteristics. Adie, the second, was exceptionally pretty—pretty with a piquant, animated prettiness—a prettiness

that had been conscious of itself almost from infancy, and had been cultivated with much ingenuity almost from that tender time. Intelligent and of a lively temperament, she permitted herself small perversities of speech and action which passed with her friends as evidence of an unreflecting spontaneity of nature; but the smiles on the young lady's lips were seldom repeated in her eyes, which kept at most times a meditative shade of observation, from which one might have inferred that Miss Adie Nixon was not a person to give herself away. Nora, the eldest of the three, was a beauty. She differed from her sister as the beautiful woman differs from the pretty girl. Tall, somewhat large of limb, her figure perfect in its grace and in its maturity of development, she had an element of superb stateliness in her beauty which made it not a little impressive; it was a beauty that imposed itself, that was never lost in a crowd, that invariably made itself felt. Her features were strong and finely-formed; her complexion was clear and colourless. An unfailing self-possession was expressed in her features, and with it a supreme indifference. But when she spoke, her face changed; it gained something of her sister's animation, and there was the play of humour on her lips. And yet, for all her grace, her stateliness, the refined voluptuousness of her beauty, her presence finally gave one an impression of something missing; when a little of the glamour had worn off, one detected a delicate want of distinction; one saw that at bottom her beauty had scarcely saved her from the crowd. May, the youngest of the three, was entitled, perhaps, to no warmer word than pretty; but there was a sincerity in her eyes which was wanting to Adie, and a tenderness which was wanting to Nora.

'I am sure I don't know how we are to find enough money to carry us through this season,' Mrs. Nixon was saying. 'Here has Weaver sent in his bill again, which makes the second time since Christmas. I suppose next time he will do us the honour of sending it with a lawyer's letter.'

'Couldn't we raise some money?' asked May, innocently.

'Raise money? My dear, we are mortgaged up to the hilt already, as the lawyers say. There is not another farthing to be raised.'

'Why not cut down the trees? That is the sort of thing people do as a last resource, isn't it?' suggested Adie, who knew more ways of spending money than of obtaining it.

'My dear, as I have often told you, if we cut down the trees



we should never be able to sell the place; and that, of course, is what we shall come to. Can't you understand that no one would buy a place that looked like an American prairie? And that's what the park would be without the trees.'

'I can't understand any one's buying it at all. I am sure I would never set foot in the place again if I could help it,' Adie replied with truth.

'I dare say not; nor would I. Goodness knows! I have had enough of the Oaks. But there are plenty of business men in Smeltington who would be only too glad to buy it, and think it a cheap way of raising themselves to the county.'

'And pass these pleasant-looking people off as their own ancestors,' suggested Nora, pointing to the portraits on the walls.

'Naturally; that would be an important part of the bargain.'

'Can't you fancy old Bothamley looking about him complacently with his, "The contradiction is only apparent, I assure you," while you are laughing at him for his nonsense about the People?'

Mrs. Nixon laughed. Adie had some reputation as a mimic, and Mr. Benjamin Bothamley, the Radical Member for Smeltington, generally known as the 'People's Ben,' was one of her most successful impersonations. The Oaks stood about a mile and a half from the outskirts of Smeltington.

'I wish we had some of his money,' said Mrs. Nixon. 'I am sure he would be very welcome to the place. But I don't think he would buy it; he has too good a house of his own; and as for the county people, he knows them as it is. Well, it will soon have to be sold, and then——'

'We shall retire to lodgings at the sea,' said Nora. 'No, our prospects are depressing. One could scarcely face them if one were not used to them. Fortunately, we are used to them—quite used to them. I feel as if I had been facing destitution from my cradle. I have a vague recollection of having heard that the dolls we played with were not paid for.'

Mrs. Nixon's face darkened. There was an edge to Nora's words, and they cut. Nora was the daughter with whom Mrs. Nixon got on least well, with whom she felt least at home. Between Adie and herself there was a certain understanding, a tacit compact of mutual forbearance. Adie might take her own way (Adie usually did), but at least outwardly and in conversation she was her mother's friend; if she opposed her it was with tact

and consideration. Nora kept herself aloof. A latent sense of irritation with her mother seemed to need constant expression; she appeared to find a humorous amusement in provoking her. And being the more persistent, as well as the quicker-witted woman of the two, she had established a certain ascendancy.

‘Couldn’t we sell some of the curiosities in the hall?’ Adie asked, coming to her mother’s relief. ‘People always seem to be a good deal impressed by the armour and things.’

‘What would be the good of selling them? They would not fetch enough to pay for your first dress in town. And what are we to put in their place? We should only have to buy something else which would look ridiculous amongst the rest of the things. The house is furnished badly enough as it is without our disposing of the few good things that are left. As it now stands the hall is imposing, and frightens people out of criticising the rest of the place.’

‘Then let us keep them by all means,’ said Nora. ‘Do they say in the letter when the house will be ready for us?’ she added.

‘I should think, if all’s well, we might go this day week; they have very little more to do now. I have heard from Lady Tomlinson this morning; they all go up to town next week. There’s an instance of a person who has done well for herself, if you like! She was a clergyman’s daughter in some out-of-the-way country parish—one of a large family. She was engaged for six months to one of her father’s pupils, but the engagement was broken off and she married his lordship. Now she has her carriage and pair and a house in Pont Street, while her sisters are teaching in the Sunday-school and making their own dresses.’

‘Lord Tomlinson is an old man, isn’t he?’ asked Adie, whom the case interested.

‘No, my dear, I shouldn’t think he is more than forty-five.’

‘Wasn’t there some talk a little time ago about their having a separation?’ Nora asked.

‘Oh, that was all nonsense; people are always saying those things. Why should Lady Tomlinson want a separation? She can see as little of her husband as she likes; they are not so very often in the same house, and when they are there are always plenty of people staying with them, so that she is never alone with him. What would she gain by a separation? It is people who live in the same room that need separations, not people like Lady Tomlinson.’

Mrs. Nixon's philosophy was received in silence. Nora disliked Lord Tomlinson for his vulgarity, and was thinking that the coarseness of the man would gravely diminish the charms of his money. Adie was speculating as to how far she possessed the strength of will necessary to get her own way with any husband who might offer her sufficient inducements, social and pecuniary, to enter the lists with him. May had seen Lord Tomlinson once, and the thought of him made her shudder.

'Well, I must be going,' said Mrs. Nixon, rising as she spoke. 'It is a quarter to eleven, and I have a great deal to see to. Don't hurry, Nora; but *when* you have done, will you ring the bell, so that we may have the things cleared away before lunch-time?'

So saying Mrs. Nixon left the room, and May followed her mother.

'Mamma is not at her best in the morning,' said Nora, helping herself to a piece of toast and pouring out some doubtful tea. The family came down to breakfast at regular intervals. At 9.30, Mrs. Nixon; a few minutes later, May; about ten, Adie; about ten minutes later, Nora—this morning she had been a little later than usual.

'Oh, it is the same every year; there is always this fuss about expenses and bills and the rest of it; only when papa was alive he and mamma used to settle it between them, and now we have the benefit of it all. It makes no difference; we always get the money from somewhere,' said Adie, tired of her mother's pecuniary embarrassments.

'I always dread the last fortnight before we go up to town,' said Nora. 'Mamma loses her head, and one can do nothing with her. Business is an insufferable subject to talk about. It should be made a serious offence to talk business.'

'We must have the money, so what is the good of making this fuss about it?' reasoned Adie.

'It's intolerable. As if it were not bad enough to be buried alive in a place like this, where the only society one gets consists of Radical ironmongers and a few families one sees about twice a year!'

'I wonder what mamma would have done if poor Philip had lived,' suggested Adie sympathetically. 'I don't believe all his bills are paid yet.'

By-and-by May came back to them.

'Mamma wants to know,' she asked, 'whether you are going with her to Mr. Bothamley's this afternoon.'

'Why is she going? He won't be in in the afternoon, will he?' Nora asked in reply.

'Yes; mamma is going to see him upon business. He told her he would be in.'

'Arthur Bendham is at home now, and I believe Mr. Keyworth is staying with him,' said Adie. 'I can't go myself.'

'Yes, we may as well go,' said Nora. 'Anything for a change.' So May took the answer back to her mother.

'Are the things cleared away yet?' asked Mrs. Nixon. May shook her head.

'There is plenty of time; it is only eleven, and we don't lunch till half-past one.' And Mrs. Nixon returned to her davenport with a feeling of profound dissatisfaction that a woman as young and as full of capabilities for social achievement as she was, should be burdened with three grown-up daughters and a heavily encumbered estate. She was by no means a methodical person. She took little interest in domestic regularity, and was willing to give her daughters plenty of latitude in the matter of breakfast. But their indifference to her troubles annoyed her. At heart she felt almost as young as they, and it tried her to reflect that while they were in the enjoyment of the triumphs and pleasures of the social fray, her own energies were being wasted upon the details of the necessary but uninteresting commissariat.

'How do you know Mr. Keyworth is staying with Arthur Bendham?' asked Nora, when May had closed the door.

'I don't know for certain. I saw Arthur Bendham in the distance yesterday afternoon walking with somebody rather like Mr. Keyworth.'

'I wonder whether it was he.'

Adie was silent a moment. Her relations with Nora were as friendly as her relations with her mother, and she showed her sister the same consideration.

'I rather wonder Mr. Keyworth doesn't do something,' she said. 'They say he did brilliantly at Oxford, and really, of course, he might do anything he chose. I don't care much for clever people as a rule, but certainly he never bores one.'

'A rare virtue,' said Nora.

Adie smiled. 'I suppose he is very well off,' she reflected.

'He will be, I imagine, when his father dies.'

Though the smile was still on Adie's lips, the shade of thoughtful observation in her eyes, as she looked at her sister, was rather deeper than usual. But Nora did not accept the invitation the look implied; it was not in her nature to be communicative.

'You meet him everywhere in town,' added Adie. 'He knows all the best people.'

'Yes; I like him,' Nora concluded.

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## CHAPTER II.

Il me semble beaucoup plus difficile d'être un moderne que d'être un ancien.

It was half-past three in the afternoon. Mr. Benjamin Bothamley was sitting in the luxury of his conservatory; between his lips a cigar, in his right hand a card, in his left a sheet of paper. In the centre of the card were the familiar words *At Home*, and above them the autograph of the Countess of Dryborough. On the sheet of paper were scribbled the headings of Mr. Bothamley's next speech in Parliament. At the bottom of the page was a sentence longer than the rest, which he had finished just as the servant had brought him the Countess's note.

The member for Smeltington had smiled as he had written that sentence, having already in his ears the *Hear, hear*, of his supporters, and the groans from the other side of the House, which were no less pleasant to him, as the actor who plays the villain in melodrama may be supposed to rejoice in the hisses of the gallery as much as his fellow actors in its applause. But when he had opened the note and had seen its contents, his feelings could no longer be expressed by a smile. They had found issue in a subdued chuckle of satisfaction. It was an invitation for which, for reasons of his own, he had long been working. One more item was added to the full list of his successes—political, social, and commercial.

Mr. Benjamin Bothamley was the biggest man in Smeltington. His ironworks covered the largest area, and his chimneys were the tallest, in the place. He employed the largest number of hands, and, it was said, had at one time treated them worst. His house was the largest on Bushby Hill, and was built on the most conspicuous site. His stables, garden, and greenhouses were thought to be worthy to be 'shown.' He had the prettiest conservatory,

the most massive plate, the cleverest pictures, the fewest books, the best wine, and the best cook of any plutocrat on Bushby Hill. He was worshipped by the people of Smeltington, and detested by their employers. He flattered the one, while the other he cruelly ignored.

When addressing his constituents, Mr. Bothamley was fond of reminding them that he himself had sprung from the people; he was one of them by birth as well as in sympathy; he was no aristocrat come to preach what he did not practice, but a downright people's man, a workman like themselves—and they forgot his London coat, and his carriage and pair, and his house on Bushby Hill, and very often believed him.

His conservatory was Mr. Bothamley's favourite retreat, and the scene of his pleasantest reveries. It commanded an unimpeded view of the town below, and Mr. Bothamley liked to pick out his own from amongst the forest of chimneys. This afternoon, however, his pleasant thoughts were destined to be interrupted. The footman had not left the conservatory five minutes when he was approached by his nephew.

'Mrs. Nixon is coming here this afternoon, isn't she?' the young fellow inquired.

'I believe she is going to do me that honour,' answered his uncle.

'Then I suppose Keyworth and I had better stay in and talk to the Miss Nixons. Mrs. Nixon will probably bring some of her daughters with her.'

'That is just as you please. I wish your friend to make himself perfectly at home—to go out when he likes and come in when he likes. Still, if you have nothing better to do, I daresay the Miss Nixons will be very glad to talk to you in the drawing-room, while their mother and I are settling our little affairs here. Handsome girls, the Miss Nixons.'

'Yes, very,' said the nephew.

'Their faces are their fortunes,' continued his uncle; 'plenty of good blood, but no money; all three in the market with their mother ready to knock them down to the highest bidder. Sharp woman, Mrs. Nixon; she'll dispose of some of them this season—take my word for it.'

'Very likely,' Arthur assented.

'And quite right too,' Mr. Bothamley went on, turning sharply on his nephew, as if his assent had contained some veiled objection

to his own theories as to the marriage of the Miss Nixons; 'time is a consideration with them now; they can't stand many more seasons. I should not be surprised if this were to be their last. They don't pay their bills; but if they did, they would not have enough left for their railway fares. The next thing they will have to do will be to sell the Oaks.'

'I should think they would have no difficulty in finding a purchaser.'

'None whatever,' said Mr. Bothamley, emphatically. 'Look what you could do with it! If Rawlinson or Tucker bought it, it would be the making of him. Depend upon it, they'll bid for it when it comes on the market. It would be the making of a man like Tucker,' he repeated.

'Perhaps it would help Mr. Tucker to get over his little difficulty with the *h's*,' Arthur suggested.

'*H's* are not Tucker's strong point,' said the great man, with a smile. 'But his wife and daughters keep him in the background; he is not wanted except at dinner-parties, when he can afford to give people wine that washes the *h's* down pretty comfortably with most of them. A good dinner will cover a vast amount of loose grammar.'

'I fancy it is a form of atonement affected by the aristocracy of Smeltington.'

'They are not the only aristocracy, Arthur, who offer their *bonbons* as a substitute for *bons mots*,' said Mr. Bothamley gravely. 'But, talking of aristocracy, I have just received this from Dryborough House.'

Arthur looked at the note.

'I suppose you will go?' he said, handing it back to his uncle.

'Certainly; and I hope I may have the pleasure of seeing you there,' he added, with an unpleasant change in his manner.

Arthur hesitated for a moment.

'I have an engagement for that night to dine with a man——'

'That is unfortunate,' said his uncle, interrupting him. 'Could you not make some excuse and put him off?'

'It's rather awkward to break one's engagement with a man——'

'Very awkward to break one's engagement with a lady,' laughed the old bachelor facetiously, again interrupting him, 'but not such a serious matter with a man. I think you might do it without offending him, if you used tact. It would be a pity to lose a dance like this, would it not? But, of course, do just as



you like. I always wish people to please themselves. This is a free country. And above all, this is Liberty Hall; Liberty Hall, Arthur; always remember that.'

The great man took a pull at his cigar while he watched his nephew with a curious twinkle in his grey eyes. Arthur was moving towards the door: the conversation, however, had taken too pleasant a turn for Mr. Bothamley to wish to see it brought to at all an abrupt termination. So he said:

'What do you think yourself? You, of course, know your friend's feelings better than I do. Do you think he would mind your throwing him over this once?'

'Oh, I will write to him,' said Arthur impatiently.

'Well, I think it would be quite worth while, if you are sure he would not be offended. Don't offend him. Is he an old friend, may I ask?'

'Yes.'

'You know, Arthur, what I always say about friendship?'

Arthur no longer had his feelings sufficiently under control to answer.

'Never exchange old friends for new—always stick to your old friends. And never make an enemy if you can help it. It has been my rule through life, and I have endeavoured to act up to it. Do you think I have been successful, Arthur?'

'Uncommonly, I should think.'

'I was sure you would say so,' said Mr. Bothamley with cruel solemnity. 'But, as regards this dance, you won't forget the date? Just look at the card again to make sure.'

'I am not likely to forget: I will go and write to the man at once to tell him I can't come——' and Arthur effected his escape before his uncle had had time to make another observation.

When he was gone the great man flicked his cigar ash carefully into the little tray at his elbow, and found relief for his good-natured merriment in a subdued chuckle of general satisfaction and contentment.

'Confound my uncle,' were Arthur's first words upon rejoining Waveney in the smoking-room.

'What is the matter now?' asked Waveney.

'I am his slave.'

'And he a Liberal!'

'It's always the same. I can't say my soul's my own. I wish he had left me to starve when my poor mother died. He told

my father he would, when he went to him after he had failed. But I won't stand it much longer. He may do what he likes with his money. I'll start on my own account——'

'Do; turn crossing-sweeper; take a crossing in Westminster, and revenge yourself by claiming relationship with your uncle when he is going down to the House with a peer on each arm.'

'It is no joke to have an uncle like mine,' said Mr. Bendham gloomily. 'You don't know what it is.'

'No?—I fancy I do. I have an aunt who would have treated me as a child just as your uncle treats you, if she could.'

'He is such a fraud,' insisted Arthur viciously.

'So is my aunt,' said Waveney quietly.

Poor Mr. Bothamley!

Poor Mrs. Fry!

'But what is it all about?' asked Waveney.

Arthur explained that a friend of his who was about to be married had invited him to a farewell bachelor party on the night of the —— instant.

'But the good uncle has another little engagement for his nephew that evening?'

'The good uncle wants me to go to a dance at Dryborough House for which we have just received invitations, his object of course being that my name may appear in the papers with his own, and thereby add to the sum of the family honours. It is a pleasant characteristic of my uncle that he does nothing without a motive.'

'Mr. Bothamley is a very successful man,' said Waveney with a smile.

'It is not that I have any particular objection to going to the dance——'

'May will probably be there.'

'Yes, I know. By the way, I forgot; some of the Nixons will be here directly.'

'I am glad to hear it. I hope Nora will come with them.'

Arthur looked at Waveney, and in his look there was a wealth of significant inquiry.

'Which means?' Waveney asked.

'I mean nothing. And,' added Arthur, 'I hope you mean as little.'

Waveney smoked in silence for a moment or so.

'Why should you hope so?' he asked.

Arthur turned away and looked out of the window.

‘She is not the right kind of girl for you.’

Waveney coloured slightly.

‘You are prejudiced,’ he was beginning, but at that moment a servant came to the smoking-room to announce that Mrs. Nixon had called with her daughters, Nora and May. The young fellows put away their cigars, and went to the drawing-room.

In a minute or two Mr. Bothamley joined them, and after a little introductory conversation, took Mrs. Nixon to his conservatory, that they might use its privacy for their business. Arthur was talking to May; Waveney was taking charge of Nora.

In personal appearance Waveney had changed a good deal during the last five years. London had set its mark on him. The down on his upper lip had developed into a small moustache, which had a smooth, well-tended look. His dark eyes, his colourless cheek (colourless but with the tint of health in it), and his quick change of expression, gave his face a character which contradicted that air of rather conscious correctness—an air so easy to recognise and so difficult to define—with which London stamps the man who belongs to it. His alert, well-tailored figure showed no symptom of foppishness, and yet there was about him—in the hang of his clothes, in his collar and tie, in the cut of his hair—the look of a man to whom a coat is a matter of material interest. His dark wavy hair, which he parted in the middle, was already growing a little thin upon the temples, and so heightening his forehead to a fault. His mouth had kept its delicacy and refinement: his manner was free from pretence, and easy.

He had finished his career at Oxford successfully nearly three years before. To a First in Mods he had added a First in Greats (the philosophy in his Greats work had suited him); and had been within a measurable distance of a fellowship. With his use of his time since leaving college he was fairly satisfied; he had travelled, and had travelled widely, having reached strange regions in the East, and studied mankind and shot a variety of shootable things in several highly picturesque portions of the globe. He had taken his tolerant and meditative habits of mind about with him wherever he had wandered, and had brought home an almost bewildering catholicity in his tastes and sympathies. He was convinced that the wisdom of human institutions was purely relative, the one thing that seemed to him absolute being the invariable folly of dogmatism. In the intervals of his travels he

lived in London, in original and luxurious little rooms in the convenient neighbourhood of Piccadilly. He belonged to a couple of expensive clubs, and his superficially sociable temperament (at bottom he still kept that element of reserve) had secured him a wide circle of acquaintances. All of which was satisfactory enough: it had belonged to his programme to travel, and it was pleasant to him to feel that this part of it had been carried out. But the thought of the future troubled him; for when he considered how these experiences were to be used to advantage, he scarcely saw his way.

'We expect to go to town next week,' Nora was saying. 'The house is nearly ready for us.'

'You will be glad to go, I should think. Unless custom has made this life more sweet for you than that of—what is it?—painted pomp. It is an age since you were in London.'

'I have had quite enough of the country,' said Nora, feelingly. 'The only tongues I find in trees are remarkably discontented and miserable. They seem to be endlessly sighing in winter for the loss of their leaves.'

Waveney laughed. 'No, I get very tired of the country myself,' he said. 'But then one may get very tired of London.'

'I don't think I ever should.'

'One may be very lonely in London,' Waveney suggested.

'When one knows as many people as you do?'

'One gets tired of people.'

'That is a little discouraging.'

'I refer, of course, to the general run of people,' he appended.

'No doubt. But isn't "general run" rather a dangerously inclusive sort of term?'

Nora looked prodigiously handsome, and the self-possession and the worldly maturity in her manner went wonderfully with the development of her figure and the proud chiselled beauty of her face. Her indifference, the seeming candour of her attitude, her apparent freedom from many of the smaller feminine ways and methods which repelled him, had an attraction for Waveney almost as great as the astonishing claims of her beauty.

'I shouldn't have said so,' he answered. 'Most people make an exception in their own favour.'

Nora smiled. 'I never get tired of London,' she said. 'I agree with the man who thought it the best place in summer and the only place in winter. It is decidedly the only place in winter.'

'At all events one always wants to go back to it. Still, I expect, after about a couple of months, I shall be nearly ready for the country again.'

'You are very restless, Mr. Keyworth.'

'I don't know—one has different moods.'

'Some of them rather unsociable moods, apparently.'

'Yes, very unsociable. Nothing but a howling wilderness would satisfy one sometimes.'

'The Sahara? Have you ever thought of trying the Sahara?'

'Often.'

'If we should miss you then, by and by, may we assume that—that Timbuctoo has become your nearest post town? Timbuctoo is in Africa, isn't it?'

Waveney laughed. 'I don't know,' he said.

'I think so,' she reflected.

'But do people never bore you?' he asked.

'I never let them bore me. I invariably avoid all undesirable people.'

'So many people are undesirable. . . . No, my interest in humanity is diminishing.'

'That is very sad. Can nothing be done for you?'

'Rapidly diminishing.'

'You should see some one. I am sure there must be a treatment for this sort of thing.'

'I know the cause. I discovered it some time ago.'

'Might I ask?—'

'Oh, yes. My interest has diminished—or seems to have diminished—because it has become concentrated.'

'Ah, I see. Upon some one?'

'Yes.'

'Do I know her?'

Fortunately, however, at that moment—for Waveney's barque was drifting ominously near the lee shore—Arthur came to his rescue by interrupting the little tête-à-tête; May had asked for some scrap of information which he had crossed the room to obtain from Waveney. The question involved discussion into which May was drawn, and for the rest of the call the conversation remained general.

Mrs. Nixon had settled her business with Mr. Bothamley in the conservatory, but the settlement was not quite so satisfactory

as she had anticipated; and so, hoping to take a little revenge on the great man, she asked him,

'Shall we have the pleasure of seeing you at Dryborough House on the —, Mr. Bothamley?'

To her disappointment Mr. Bothamley handed her the card.

'I have just received this,' he said.

'Oh, I am so glad. Of course, you will accept? The balls at Dryborough House are really quite important events in their way. Such beautiful rooms, and you meet, you know—well, very interesting people'—the gatherings at Dryborough House, of course, being notoriously 'mixed.' 'We make a point of going every year.'

'I hope to be there if I can get away from the House,' said Mr. Bothamley, with becoming indifference.

'Oh, you really must, Mr. Bothamley. I forget whether you were there last year?' she asked, quite innocently.

'No, I was not,' he replied, with a smile and a twinkle in his grey eyes which seemed to say, 'I see through it all, but my turn will come by-and-by.'

'What a pity!' said Mrs. Nixon, sympathetically. 'But I dare say you have often been there before. It is a place where one meets such numbers of M.P.'s. The Countess is a great politician, and Lady Tomlinson says all sorts of intrigues are carried on at her parties, and she is rather behind the scenes, you know, Mr. Bothamley. But the Countess does not belong to your party, for she is Tory to the backbone and tremendously opposed to the socialism of the present day, so I don't suspect you of political designs. Your Radicalism would horrify her.'

'It has always been one of my rules in life, Mrs. Nixon, to avoid giving people unnecessary offence,' replied the great man, with a pleasant smile. 'I always endeavour to steer clear of hurting people's feelings or trespassing upon their private opinions. When at Rome, do as Rome does. And when one is with people with whose political convictions one does not agree, one does not discuss politics. I make this an invariable rule.'

'Oh, of course, there is no reason why you should talk politics with the Countess—none whatever,' said Mrs. Nixon. 'But as a matter of fact, Mr. Bothamley, do you really think the aristocracy are as superfluous, and burdensome, and all that sort of thing, as people make out? Don't you think that with land going to the bad in this way the aristocracy are rather a class to be pitied?'

They are nothing like so well off as people with large—businesses, for instance.'

'Individually I have the greatest respect for many members of the aristocracy,' answered Mr. Bothamley, blandly, though he preferred keeping his political convictions for the platform and for Parliament. 'It is a question of principle. It is too late in the day to be ruled by an aristocracy. This is the age of the People. It is the People who are the life and strength and backbone of all nations. They make the wealth——'

'And you spend it,' said Mrs. Nixon. 'A more equal distribution of labour than of wealth, eh, Mr. Bothamley?' she suggested laughingly. 'But don't talk about our being ruled: the word is obsolete. Nobody rules nowadays—we regulate. I forget who says so.'

Mr. Bothamley laughed.

'It is all very amusing,' she said, beginning to arrange her mantle as if she meant to go. 'Very amusing. But I wonder they don't see through you.'

'My dear Mrs. Nixon,' said the great man, deprecatingly.

'Their education can't have advanced very far or they would. The contradiction is obvious enough. A place like this'—she looked about her. 'And popular sympathies! . . . Hum'—she shrugged her shoulders—'don't go together somehow.'

'One must take a broad view in questions of this kind,' said Mr. Bothamley, gravely. 'If you do, you will find that the contradiction is only apparent. Life is full of such contradictions. They arise from the existing conditions of society. You see people buying diamond bracelets when you know they owe a friend of yours several hundred pounds and can't pay him. But you think nothing of it. You see people smiling in their carriages as they take their afternoon drives in the park, when you know they have been listening all the morning to each ring of the bell, dreading lest it should bring them a dun. But what of it? People go to church every Sunday and hear the eighth Commandment read, but they don't pay their bills any the more for that.'

The smile on Mrs. Nixon's face was beginning to grow faint.

'No, life is full of contradiction,' continued Mr. Bothamley, in a full, cheerful voice. 'One should always be very slow to judge by appearances. I have known people who have kept their carriage and lived in excellent style, and yet would have found it an inconvenience to be asked unexpectedly for a 10*l.* note.'



'Really?' said Mrs. Nixon, from whose face the smile had entirely faded. 'But don't you think there is a great deal of exaggeration in these things? I never believe half the stories I hear about people's incomes. If a person is suspected of living beyond his means, he is at once put down as a beggar. It is such nonsense.'

'There is undoubtedly a great deal of exaggeration,' admitted the Member for Smeltington, affably, while the twinkle in his eye seemed to say, 'I rather fancy it is my turn now.' 'But it doesn't do to look merely on the surface.'

Mrs. Nixon rose to go. Certainly, this afternoon, she felt, Mr. Bothamley was more than usually impossible.

'I must be going,' she said. 'I suppose I shall find the girls in the drawing-room?'

Mr. Bothamley opened the door for her, and followed her to the drawing-room where, as she had expected, Nora and May were waiting for her. If Mrs. Nixon could have heard the conversation that had been passing there a few minutes before, she might perhaps have found some compensation for her difficulties and disappointment in the conservatory.

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### CHAPTER III.

The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces.

It was the night of the Countess of Dryborough's ball.

Mrs. Nixon was looking her youngest and her best. Life had begun again for her during the past few weeks. The stagnation of the country was over. Lawyers, business, mortgages, and other disagreeables had been banished to that uncomfortable little period in the morning which lies between the moment when one wakes and the arrival of one's maid with one's first cup of tea. She found herself far less 'shelved' than she had expected. Indeed, but for her daughters, she flattered herself she could have kept more men about her than many much younger women. She was conscious of wearing extremely well. Credit was still fairly easy to obtain, and her misgivings as to the continued credulity of her tradespeople were by no means realised. And there was a certain freshness about it all, owing to her prolonged residence in the country, which she had not known for many years.

To marry three daughters in one season belongs to that category of phenomenal occurrences in which one places such rare events as winning the Derby, St. Leger, and Two Thousand with the same horse, or the appearance of three comets in the same year. To this Mrs. Nixon did not aspire. But such had been her good fortune, and such, she was inclined to think, her skilful generalship, that she already had plans for disposing of her two eldest daughters, and thereby saving herself from retirement to the sea and the Oaks from the hammer of the auctioneer. The season was still young. People had not left off asking her how long she had been in town. And yet Mrs. Nixon regarded two facts as well established: first, that Nora was to be one of the successes of the season; secondly, that Lord Pilkington's name was beginning to be whispered about in connection with that of her second daughter. Chance had first brought them together on the top of young Turnover's drag on the occasion of a picnic given by that gentleman at a little retreat near Henley. In the course of the afternoon Lord Pilkington and Adie had been separated from the rest of the party, caught in a thunderstorm, and compelled to take refuge in an arbour, with something of the fatality that ever since the days of poor Dido seems to have attached to picnics, arbours, and thunderstorms. Suffice it to say, that the three-quarters of an hour's tête-à-tête in the arbour had filled his lordship with a desire to cultivate the acquaintance of his companion, which that young lady's mother had availed herself of every opportunity to gratify. Having assured herself as to the state of the Pilkington quarries, she had given his lordship the entrée of the little house in Mayfair, and had made his visits more frequent than he had himself discovered. In that lay Mrs. Nixon's consummate skill. She did not look like a designing mother.

But though her inquiries as to the Pilkington quarries had been sufficiently satisfactory, her investigations had led to other revelations connected with his lordship of which she would rather have remained in ignorance. Lord Pilkington was a widower—that was not a matter of much importance; but of his married life Mrs. Nixon had learnt many curious facts. It appeared that the policy of mutual non-interference, in which she herself was a convinced believer, had not sufficed for Lord and Lady Pilkington, who for half their brief married life had availed themselves of that total immunity from each other's society which is afforded by the terms of a carefully-devised legal separation. The world

had spoken plainly at the time, and had pronounced his lordship's conduct to his wife simply brutal—a verdict which, considering how little in some respects the condemned man differed from his neighbours, was decidedly to the credit of the world. Six years of widowerhood, passed in the unimpeachable occupations of keeping a yacht and a four-in-hand, had not served wholly to purify Lord Pilkington's reputation from the taint of those early scandals, which still clung to him, as the odour of an objectionable animal will cling to its fur even when a princess wears it. And Mrs. Nixon, who still had the remains of a heart—or possibly even of a conscience—left somewhere about her, would much have preferred that Adie's prospect of happiness should not have been dimmed by having these shadows upon it.

There was one thing in her friend Lady Tomlinson of which she stood in dread—her ladyship's politics. Mrs. Nixon was fond of occasionally setting forth her own convictions; but she hated argument, and when she was called upon to justify her invective, usually changed the subject. With Lady Tomlinson politics were a serious interest. She belonged to a political set, and prided herself upon being not a little behind the scenes. When they were by themselves Mrs. Nixon avoided politics. This evening, however, a few minutes after they had met, they happened to be joined by her brother-in-law, Major Nixon, who, finding himself generally of Lady Tomlinson's opinion, often provoked her to express it. He was a well-preserved, middle-aged man, a bachelor and a lover of his club, his face and figure slightly betraying the habitual goodness of his living.

'If Shakespeare had lived in these days,' Lady Tomlinson was saying, 'he would not have asked, "Why should the poor be flatter'd?" Flattery of the poor is the keynote of modern politics.'

'It is absurd,' said the Major; 'absurd!'

'But, my dear Major, what is still more absurd is all this talk about the land. What would the people do with it if they got it?'

'Grow cabbages,' suggested Mrs. Nixon, who thought she was appealed to.

'Don't pay,' murmured the Major, who had been paying an early visit in the country. 'Have to pass a law to make people eat them on Fridays.'

'Precisely,' said Lady Tomlinson. 'Vegetables are too cheap to be profitable as it is. No,' she went on, gaining a certain

impetus of conviction as she proceeded, 'and the amusing thing is that Democracy does nothing for the poor. Democracy simply means Push, and Equality a universal Scramble. The only class which has nothing to do with either is the People with a big P. They never push. Politics begin higher up.'

'I quite agree with you,' said Mrs. Nixon, a little absently, her attention being fixed not so much upon the question of Push as upon the movements of a gentleman in another part of the room, who, she thought, was probably looking for Nora; and she had come to the conclusion that, if he appealed to her, she would render him no assistance in finding her daughter—first, on account of her partner of a previous dance, with whom she suspected Nora to be lingering; secondly, because, in spite of all his tailor, experience, nature, and his valet had done for the Hon. B. S. Poppem, he was too hopelessly a younger son for her to have any wish to encourage him.

'Push, Push, Push!' continued Lady Tomlinson, absorbed in her subject. 'Push for everybody, and the People to the wall. Politics, I suppose, begin with that complete embodiment of selfishness, the small shopkeeper—and his champion, the lower middle-class popular preacher. Democracy flatters the poor: but it contrives not to legislate for them.'

But here, fortunately for Mrs. Nixon, Lady Tomlinson's disquisition was interrupted for the moment by Mr. Poppem, who came to ask Mrs. Nixon whether she could tell him where he might find Nora, to whom he was engaged for the next dance. Mrs. Nixon was sorry, but had not seen Nora for some time.

Mr. Poppem wandered away, looking discouraged.

'Yes,' said Mrs. Nixon, sympathetically, 'it is all very true. I wish Mr. Bothamley were here to listen to it.'

'I saw him a little while ago,' said Lady Tomlinson.

'What Bothamley is that?' asked the Major. 'You don't mean the M.P.—the man who made that abominable speech the other night?'

'Of course I do. He is almost a neighbour of ours in Oreshire.'

'But you don't mean to say you know him? My dear Laura, why do you know such people?'

'Know him? Of course we know him. I shall introduce you to him if he comes this way.'

'Thanks,' said the Major, getting up; 'thanks. I am glad to say I still draw the line somewhere.'

He began to move away.

'I shall introduce you all the same if I get the chance,' Mrs. Nixon called softly after him.

The Major was out of hearing.

'It is a comfort nowadays to find some one who does draw the line,' observed Lady Tomlinson. 'There is nothing we need so much as an uncompromising use of the ruler.'

Mrs. Nixon's consideration for Nora's partner did that gentleman but little good; for though Waveney had secured a corner in an almost empty room—a corner which established an unmistakable claim to privacy—a gentleman, disregarding the proprieties of the situation, had tactlessly—or audaciously—joined them, and had seated himself beside Nora. He was a good-looking man, of any age between forty-five and five-and-fifty, dark, with strong, well-marked features, though the lips were a trifle too full and red, wearing neither beard nor moustache, but neat and well-trimmed whiskers. The unpleasant fulness of the lips and the restlessness of the indefinite-coloured eyes made it scarcely a face to inspire much confidence, though the ease of his manner and a mature assurance in his bearing seemed to betoken success.

He showed no consciousness of having done an awkward thing. He talked pleasantly and lightly to Nora, and was careful—possibly too careful, it suggested effort—to keep Waveney in the conversation. Waveney's manner in return was not gracious; the brevity of his observations, and the sarcasm with which he edged them, were markedly discouraging in intention, and the persistent friendliness and good humour with which they were received obviously heightened his irritation. Nora remained patiently indifferent. She showed no perceptible annoyance at the untimely interruption, but still managed to give Waveney the feeling that she had not forgotten him. He had long been impressed by Nora's ability to deal with social emergencies; it was a quality for which he respected her, but at the same time it weighed on him a little, for her knowledge of the ways of the world looked at times like a somewhat unlovable worldliness.

'Gilbert is a man I can't stand,' he said, when they were alone again.

'No? Isn't he very much like other people?'

'He suggests the company promoter. There is villainy in the trim of his whiskers.'

'It is a pity villainy is not always so patent.'

'What is he?'

'I don't know.'

'Nobody knows. And yet one meets him everywhere.'

'I imagine he does nothing.'

'I suppose so. He is a man I have always disliked.'

'I thought you had only just made his acquaintance.'

'Yes, I spoke to him for the first time a night or two ago. But I have known him by sight for some time. I have seen him at your house,' he added, with a certain emphasis.

'He was a friend of my father's,' she answered.

Waveney hesitated a moment. 'I almost wonder,' he said, 'since you have known him so long, your people have never heard what he does.'

'He was a friend of my father's,' she repeated, significantly, 'and my father's friends were sometimes—well, a trifle miscellaneous.'

Waveney moved uneasily. He was irritated, and this particular allusion jarred on him. The indifference with which Nora made it appeared to him not in good taste.

'You seem to see a good deal of him,' he said.

'I think we do.'

'I believe he has spoken to you before this evening?'

'Twice.'

'You are going to dance with him perhaps?'

Nora looked at her card. 'I see he is down for the next dance but one.'

Waveney bit his lip.

'He still dances?' he asked.

Nora smiled. 'I am afraid you are prejudiced,' she said. 'I don't know any one else who objects to Mr. Gilbert.'

Waveney's manner suddenly changed. 'Perhaps no one else has my reason for objecting,' he murmured, under his breath.

Nora naturally understood him, and was disposed, it seemed, to be propitiated.

'One must be free,' she said, meaningly, but smiling a little as she looked at him. 'And prejudices are not things to be encouraged.'

His face cleared. Nora, in a dress of almost excessive magnificence, looked bewilderingly beautiful. The warmth of the room had given colour to her cheek, and there was an animation in her features and in the still depths of her eyes which heightened

the seductive grace of her attitude as she sat back in her seat indolently and leisurely fanning herself. The spell of her beauty was strong on him—a beauty queenly and superb.

‘Isn’t it rather cruel to talk of freedom to a man who is bewitched?’ he asked.

The movement of the fan ceased. ‘Doesn’t that a little suggest the last century?’ she smiled. ‘Surely “bewitched” is obsolete.’

‘It will last as long as “woman.”’

The fan moved again. ‘I think “bewitched” is not wholly complimentary,’ she reasoned. ‘It suggests a conflict with the better judgment.’

‘My better judgment is quite satisfied.’

Nora lightly shrugged her shoulders.

But seeing a man come into the room, who looked about him with an air of expectant discovery, and whom he knew to be Nora’s partner for the next dance, Waveney changed his tone, and whispered hurriedly, ‘Cut Gilbert. I’ll come to you just before the dance, and we’ll escape him somehow.’

The discoverer advanced towards them.

She shook her head. ‘No, it wouldn’t do. Mr. Gilbert is not a man to let himself be cut. And I have sat out with you too much as it is.’

‘I’ll have my revenge,’ he muttered.

‘Do. Come and watch him dance!’

The gentleman came to Nora, suggested that the next dance was his, and had his suggestion accepted. She rose, and took his arm.

Waveney wandered through the rooms, his bearing as he threaded the crowded groups showing the easy confidence of a man sure of himself, who is familiar with scenes like this, giving words and nods of recognition to people he knew as he passed, and these people seemed to be numerous. Prospects as good as his, combined with his show of advantages, mental and social and personal, are not too plentiful in London, and the fact had been abundantly recognised. The world was offering its best to him. The oldest houses admitted the claim of his birth; the possibilities shown by his career at Oxford gained him admittance to circles where brains are asked for with family; the excellent preservation of the acres at home made him acceptable everywhere. And though his head was only a little turned by these various



successes, he was sufficiently conscious of his opportunities to wonder at times whether he was making the best of them.

Near the supper-room he met Arthur Bendham.

'Where's May?' Waveney asked.

'I am just looking for her.'

'You have not been dancing with her much.'

'No.'

'How is that?'

A ferocious light gleamed in the young man's eye. 'I don't wish to arouse suspicion.'

'The uncle?'

'Yes: it is always the uncle. Have you seen him? He is in great form to-night. Of course, I know,' he added in a different tone, with lengthening face, changing his attitude, 'I know nothing really can come of it; but still——'

'I understand. Yes, gather ye rosebuds while ye may. But it is not altogether satisfactory, is it?'

Arthur shook his head mournfully. 'No, it is not satisfactory,' he repeated. He looked up. 'I have seen you with Nora,' he added.

'Yes, I have had some dances with her.'

'She must know your step by this time.'

Waveney seemed not to hear.

'Going to have any more dances with her?'

'No.'

Arthur looked pleased.

'It is a subject upon which we are not likely to agree,' said Waveney, coldly. 'Let us avoid it.'

'I wish it were not there to be discussed,' Arthur murmured, as he turned from him and moved away.

Half an hour later Waveney left Dryborough House.

*(To be continued.)*

## CHARACTER NOTE.

## THE FRENCHMAN.

La gaité est près de la bonté.

JEAN is perhaps five-and-thirty years old. Jean has a little moustache waxed carefully at the ends, a little intellect uncommonly quick and bright, and a manner into which are condensed the most perfect good-humour, cheeriness, politeness, *obligeance* and *savoir-faire* in the world. Jean owns, in fact, a number of charming characteristics for which synonyms are not to be found either in the English language, or nation. Jean has a *verve* and *aplomb* quite unlimited. Jean dramatises his words by an action of the hands, face, and shoulders entirely expressive. He is as free from self-consciousness as an infant. He wears, with a delight that is perfectly fresh and youthful, collars and cuffs which have Frenchman stamped all over them, and ties his ties in a little bow the jauntiness of which no Englishman has ever accomplished or, perhaps, essayed.

Jean is from Paris. He is not, as he would say himself with a perfect freedom from embarrassment, of the high world. Jean's papa, whom he speaks of even now with tears in his quick and emotional little eyes, was in fact an obscure clerk in an obscure office on the Boulevards. Jean himself lives in London, and having a very little voice, a great sense of music, and an infinite amount of what his earliest patroness calls *chic*, as if it were a substantive, sings comic songs in his own language at the 'At Homes' of great persons in London.

Jean is by way of being a success. He sings, and, if it may be so said, makes a fool of himself with an *abandon* which pleases greatly a solid British audience, who has never and could never so abandon itself for a second. Jean uses a thousand gestures—from Paris. He gives one the impression of being entirely carried away on the swing and rhythm of his song and music. He is undaunted always by the adversities of any circumstances in which he may find himself. And that he often finds himself at the fashionable party in circumstances uncommonly trying to his art and to his temper will not be doubted.

Jean makes a little way for himself to the piano through the

rudest crowd in the world, a crowd of well-dressed English women, with an infinite patience, politeness, and sweet temper. Jean receives the elbows of the modern Amazonian daughter in his eye, with a murmur of apology in his own courteous language on his lips. Jean, who has the misfortune to understand English perfectly, though he can only speak it a little, listens to a thousand perfectly candid expressions of opinion on himself. It dawns upon him, quite early in his modest career, that his audience do not for the most part understand a word of what he sings.

'When I come to 'Yde Park in my song,' he says in confidence and the very worst English to an elderly and cynical guest who is leaning against a mantelpiece, yawning, 'they laugh—'ow they laugh! And there is no joke there—none.'

'It's the first word they've understood, you know,' says the cynic. And Jean lifts his shoulders with a resigned smile and a sigh.

He perceives, with his gay little sense of humour pleasantly tickled, that many persons are shocked at his innocent airs, on the principle that whatever is French is also necessarily improper, while others, the 'new English mees,' for instance, are pleased in the delusion that they are listening to something *risqué* and music-hall. Jean bears, with his gay equanimity quite undisturbed, the stony, unsmiling stare of the despondent British *milord*, who has been towed to the party by a fashionable wife, and is full of pessimism and longings for his study and a newspaper.

'But yes,' says Jean, with a shrug. 'It is easier when you smile. You do not smile much, you English. I do not do it for pleasure, you understand. I am—how do you call it?—mercenary. It is for Marie, and little Jules and Bébé.'

Marie is Jean's wife, a young wife still, who takes her part in the performance by playing Jean's accompaniments and smiling a little at the jokes which she has heard a thousand times and at Jean. Jean, whose good temper has never been shaken by the rudeness of servants, the meanness of employers, the candour of audiences and the sips of sweet lemonade which are spoken of by the hostess as 'refreshment,' has a quick rage storming in his breast when an English madam suggests as delicately as she can to Marie that Marie should dress for professional purposes in a style more gay and French. Jean thinks Marie quite lovely always. Loveliest of all, perhaps, in that very old black frock which he bought with her in Paris, in a brief honeymoon time of prosperity. Jean thinks Marie looks her best with her dark hair

disordered by the clutches of Béb , with the little flush that comes into her cheeks after a vivacious game on the floor with Jules. It is Marie herself who perceives that madam is right, who soothes Jean's indignation with a small, brown hand laid appealingly on his gay waistcoat, who reminds him that little indignities mustn't matter when one has to think of the children, and who makes herself, out of the cheapest materials, a fine little gown and bonnet, bright with a contrast of colours such as only a Frenchwoman dares to attempt.

The little couple are poor indeed, even when Jean becomes among a select coterie in some sort fashionable, but they are as happy, perhaps, as any two people in the world. They trudge cheerfully from Pimlico, where they lodge obscurely, to some fine house in the West End. Jean tucks Marie's slight hand under his arm. He treats her with a politeness which is not only of the manner but of the heart. He is attached to her with that generous, impulsive, demonstrative affection which is just a little ridiculous, and most true. Marie, indeed, is not amused, but touched, when Jean with a spontaneous action which is wholly natural, lays his hand on his heart, and bursts out into a quick French torrent of warm words. They have been married six years, and have still for each other, in some sort, the feeling of lovers. Madame, in fact, their early patroness, who has herself been a long while prosily married to a great deal of money, suspects them for some time of being bride and bridegroom, and when she learns of her mistake by accident, says, 'Aren't these French people *extraordinary*?' and gives them up, as it were, in despair.

Jean adds to domestic affection an infinite and blithe contentment. He has an air of enjoying himself at the parties he attends professionally which is quite inspiring. He takes a cup of tepid tea beforehand with quite a blithe smile, and by way of raising his spirits to the requisite pitch of hilarity necessary to his entertainments. When the party is over he buttons himself cheerfully into a tight overcoat, wraps up Marie in her shawls, and the pair go out into the winter night, talking and gay. They slip through the carriages waiting for the guests and take the last omnibus to Pimlico. Jean's good-humour does not desert him even in this abominable vehicle, when he is sat on by the two stout women who apparently live in omnibuses, or when his boots, which are small and patent leather, and of which he is a little bit proud, are crushed by the heavy feet of the vulgar.

For Marie's sake, indeed, he would like to ride in a carriage. Towards her his feelings are infinitely chivalrous, tender and protecting. For himself, he is not particular. Perhaps because he has not been brought up with the more fastidious tastes of a higher class. Or perhaps because he is by nature gay, unselfish, and well contented to take things contentedly, as they are.

Jean is glad when his performances take place in the afternoon. Then, when he and Marie come home, they can have a game with the children. Jean lacks, it is thought, many of those stout, solid, durable virtues of which Englishmen are proud, but he is at least domestic to a fault. After the game Jean smokes meditatively. The room is only the usual room of a second-rate English lodging-house, abominable with antimacassars, artificial flowers, and oleographs, but it makes a pretty picture with Jules of four, in a frock playing on the floor, and Marie, in her old gown and the pretty disorder in her hair, walking up and down and singing, in a little voice that would be of no use at all professionally, to the baby on her shoulder. When she has put the children to bed, and she and Jean have had coffee such as the British servant never made, Jean comes to the little fire where Marie is standing and puts his impulsive arm round her waist. He says a number of things to her which do not bear translation; which are ridiculous even in French perhaps, or in any language, though Marie does not think so.

They practise Jean's new songs afterwards, to Marie's accompaniment on a lamentable hired piano. Jules makes his grimaces and expressive actions of hand and shoulders quite faithfully. He overhears once someone say at one of his parties that to make a buffoon of yourself is, from a cultured point of view, possibly one of the lowest means of making a livelihood extant. Is it? Well, perhaps. The remark strikes a little chill at the time even into Jean's brave and cheery soul. But, after all, what would you? To earn a livelihood commonly is better, when one has Marie and the children to think of, than not to earn it at all. The end justifies the means perhaps. And if one can be a clown and buffoon, and yet gay, honest, sober, and self-respecting, Jean is no doubt the person who accomplishes that difficult feat.

The last news of the little party is, however, that Marie's uncle has left them some money, enough and not too much for wants so quiet and domestic; that Jean thinks of giving up his occupation, and returning with Marie, Jules and Béb  to that heaven which is called Paris,

*GLEAMS OF MEMORY; WITH SOME  
REFLECTIONS.<sup>1</sup>*

BY JAMES PAYN.

CHAPTER III.

THERE is nothing that brings the conviction home to a man that he is growing old more than the occasional reminiscence of some incident which, from its nature, could hardly have happened within a couple of generations. People were coarser then than they are now, and more outright in their repartees. I remember as a boy a Colonel B. at Portsmouth, who was very kind to me in his way, but of a violent and indeed uncontrollable temper. He had been in his youth a notorious fire-eater, and he had passed his latter years in tropic climes, which had not cooled his disposition. So long had he been away that he knew little of the modern usages of society, and appeared at a great ball in the neighbourhood of the town in white trousers. This had been the evening attire of officers in uniform in the West Indies, where he had last hailed from, but in England it was as unknown as the dodo. There were probably two hundred of his brother officers in the ball-room, and he alone in 'ducks.' The hostess was a friend of my family and had kindly sent me an invitation, though I was much too young for such an entertainment, and I never shall forget the excitement caused by the Colonel's appearance. Feeling the uniqueness of his costume, he sought me out perhaps as being the only person present unconscious of its incongruity. Every one cast an oblique look at his ducks and hid an involuntary smile; but what took all my attention was the Colonel's face, as he gazed about him wanting to shoot somebody; its scarlet was ample compensation for the absence of colour in his legs. The way in which he swore under his breath—though I could hear him—was something terrible, and had all the attraction of novelty. However, no blood was spilt, and he presently got away, but the story was all over the town. The next day a noble earl of royal descent came down to Portsmouth and was entertained by the military at luncheon. He knew nothing of Colonel B.'s temper, and how it had been exasperated the night before, or he would

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certainly not have selected him as the recipient of a rudeness; but his lordship was given to express himself coarsely, and without regard to the feeling of others. The Colonel was hacking at a chicken of which the guest of the day had expressed a wish to partake, and not being accustomed to wait, got impatient, and thus delivered himself: 'It was a saying of my royal father, Colonel B., that good carving showed the gentleman.' 'Was it, indeed?' returned the Colonel, all the indignation which had been bottled up for twelve hours suddenly finding vent; 'and what was the opinion of your royal mother upon that subject?' It was not perhaps a very witty repartee, but it was an exceedingly effective one, and made a great sensation. But the whole scene, as I heard it described, seems to belong to the days of the Regency.

I have my full share of the weakness of human nature, but I do not remember that I was ever shy; and perhaps my freedom from this attribute prevents my quite appreciating the torture of those who suffer from this calamity. Still, I can feel for them, and two incidents still remain in my mind which at the time almost drew tears from my eyes.

A clergyman of my acquaintance, Mr. S., was a perfect victim to this mental disease, and he had one of those pink-and-white complexions which betray its existence by a modest blush on the very slightest occasion. He lived a solitary life as a curate in an out-of-the-way part of the country, till in an evil hour a scion of a noble house persuaded him to become 'warming-pan' for him in a rich living in Devonshire which he himself was not at present old enough to hold. Until lodgings could be procured for him, S. was invited to stay at the family seat, which, as generally happened, was full of company. Poor S. felt himself there like a fish out of water, and a very small fish. A bevy of fair and fashionable young ladies made existence intolerable to him by occasionally addressing him in public; by a young lady in private I do not think that S. had ever been addressed. He used to go into the neighbouring town daily to procure articles of furniture for his lodgings, and the lady of the house asked him at the breakfast-table one morning what his plans were for the day. 'Well,' he said, turning red as a rose, 'I am going into Exeter to buy a pair of drawers.' I am sorry to say for the manners of the aristocracy that this little mistake of a 'pair' for a 'chest' caused a shout of inextinguishable laughter, and poor S.'s face remained for a week less like a rose than a peony.



When instituted in his new office he went round the parish to make acquaintance with his congregation. It was very wet weather, and he got almost swamped in the Devonshire lanes, but he persisted in his duty. On one occasion he called on an honest farmer of the good old school, who asked him how he liked Devonshire. 'Oh, I like it exceedingly,' said S.; 'but I find it rather muddy. I notice, however,' pointing to the farmer's boot, 'that you take very sensible precautions to keep yourself out of the wet.' 'Well, you see, Mr. S., I've got a club-foot,' S. waited to hear no more, but fled instantly from the house, and only after much solicitation could he be induced to remain in the living. The farmer never understood why he had run away, and thought he had been taken suddenly ill.

What he suffered, however, was nothing to what I subsequently suffered in consequence of S.'s mishap. I thought the story very humorous, and told it in my best manner at a large dinner-party at a house at which I had never dined before. During the narration I received a violent kick on the leg from my next neighbour, but thought it accidental. The tale was received in total silence, and it was some time before general conversation was resumed. 'That was a very amusing story,' whispered my neighbour. 'But,' being very angry at the want of appreciation shown to it, I put in quickly: 'But, you would say, deuced stupid people to tell it to.' 'No, my dear fellow, it isn't *that*, but our host has a club-foot.' Then I knew what S. had suffered, and wished I could have run away as he did. In all such cases, however, the man who has inadvertently put his foot in it in this manner should comfort himself with the reflection that his own feelings are much more lacerated than those of the person on whose account he has been made wretched. He knows one has spoken in ignorance, and if he is a good fellow feels pity rather than anger.

It could only have been in accordance with the fitness of things if the circumstance that caused Mr. Decimus Green's retirement from the Church had happened to Mr. S. Mr. Green I knew; he could ride well, a gift not generally associated with shyness, but was as shy as a fawn. He had bought a high-mettled mare cheap, for whose legs a sea-bath had been recommended, and though she could be taken to the water she could not be persuaded by the groom to enter it. Mr. Green thought he would do better than the groom, and when he took his own bath in the sea *in puris naturalibus* resolved that the mare

should take hers. She was brought down to him and he mounted her, but after a sharp struggle she turned short round, and before he could throw himself off made straight for the little town of which he was (or rather thought he was) the perpetual curate.

He was not fastened to his steed, like Mazeppa ; he was not a voluntary equestrian, like Lady Godiva ; but he had not the presence of mind to throw himself off, and, like the other lady in the ballad, he had 'nodings on.' That day was the last day of his curacy.

Another true tale of a curate by no means shy, but who felt the sensation for once, and I have done with my illustrations of this weakness. He was a relative of my own, and had proper views of comfort and even luxury. I remember that even the pieces of linen on which he wiped his razors were frilled. He was a handsome, pleasant fellow, and more popular among the county families than country curates are wont to be. In return for their hospitality he resolved to give some of them a little dinner. The viands were unexceptionable, and as it was winter time he even provided hot-water plates for his guests. His man, however, who was also his groom, had had little experience as a butler, and when the guests trooped down to dinner each found a hot-water plate on his or her chair. It was winter time, and the poor fellow had, from their conformation, mistaken the purpose for which these plates were intended ; but it was a bad five minutes for a host who piqued himself on having everything perfect.

It is difficult in this world to always avoid being placed in a false position. H., a dear friend of mine, of great University reputation, was once staying with me in Edinburgh. His manners were most courteous to strangers, but he was very fastidious and particular. Walking down Princes Street one day a gentlemanly young fellow thus addressed him : 'Excuse me, sir, but I have never been in this town before, and though a Scotsman do not know which is Scott's monument.' My friend told him, and finding him greedy of information, like Dr. Johnson's young waterman, who was 'ready to give what he had' to know about the Golden Fleece, discoursed to him of various matters. Presently a police-inspector stopped them, and inquired of H. 'whether he was aware that he was walking with the most notorious thief in Edinburgh.' Lord Byron tells us that the most gentlemanly young man he ever met in his life was a pickpocket, and H. always declared the same thing of this agreeable stranger.

H. was bursar of his college, but decided to leave Cambridge for the Bar, and arranged with C., the great conveyancer, to read with him. C., though so learned in the law, was ignorant of University matters. In speaking of his new pupil, he said what a really interesting and accomplished man he was; it was most satisfactory to see persons of that stamp (H. was senior classic) desirous of belonging to a learned profession; it was curious, too, that his talents had been recognised, for, bursar though he was, he had brought personal introductions with him from two of her Majesty's judges. C. had got into his head that a bursar was a sort of butler.

The falsest position in which I ever saw any of my fellow-creatures was unhappily shared by myself. I once accompanied a great moral philosopher and a distinguished mathematician to a dinner at Greenwich. After the feast we strolled into the grounds of Greenwich Hospital to smoke our cigars; my companions, who had dined exceedingly well, were deep in a discussion upon 'Fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute,' when it was rather vulgarly interrupted by a policeman. 'Now you ought to know that no smoking is allowed here, gents, so just you throw them cigars away.' My distinguished friends regarded the man in philosophic silence, and left me to argue with him. I pointed out to him that the building under which we sat was of solid stone, and not combustible by any number of lighted cigars; but the guardian of the law was deaf to reason, and we had to comply with his monstrous directions. We moved away, as we thought, well out of his beat, and in a more retired part of the grounds lit fresh cigars, and the interrupted discussion about 'Fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute' was renewed. Then all of a sudden the same policeman put his helmeted head round the corner. 'Ah, you're at it again, are you? Well, now you will all three just come with me to the police office.' The philosopher and the mathematician were in short in custody, and so was I (but that was comparatively of no consequence). They walked quietly (it never came to the frog's march) to their doom, as though there had been no such thing as free will and foreknowledge in the world, but only fate. After a severe lecture from the sergeant in charge, we regained our liberty, but I am sure that my two companions (at all events) had never been in so false a position in their lives.

The most striking specimen of a false position was perhaps that in which a friend of mine, not unknown in the commercial

world, found himself in his efforts to escape the jury list. He had evaded it for some time by the assistance of an official in consideration of a certain *douceur*, but he had got tired of paying what had been in fact an annuity, and wanted the thing to be done with for good and all. 'For ten pounds,' said the official, 'I will guarantee that you shall never be troubled again;' and the money was paid. When the day came for his attendance at the court, my friend (John Jones, let me call him) could not resist the temptation of seeing how his money had been invested, and repaired to Westminster, where justice was then administered. He described the sensation of hearing 'John Jones' called out as rather peculiar; it was called out a second time, and he could hardly resist answering to his name; when it was called out a third time he felt quite eerie, and much more so at what took place in consequence. A person in deep mourning and with a voice broken with emotion, exclaimed, 'John Jones is dead, my lord.' And his lordship, with a little reflected melancholy in his tone, observed, 'Poor fellow! scratch his name out.'

Another case of a gentleman finding himself in a false position (though he had no idea of it) was that of Sir C. A., a constant attendant at the whist-table of a country club. He had grown grey (or so he used to say, but afterwards discarded that form of words) in the service of his country, and had done so for some years, when one day he appeared at our club with hair as dark as the raven's wing.

Nobody remarked upon it, though of course everybody noticed it, and he actually was under the impression that his transformation had not been observed. 'Did you notice,' he said to a confidential friend after the rubber, 'anything different—as regards—ahem!—my hair?' 'Well, I see you have taken to a wig.' 'What! you saw that did you? But you're a deuced observant fellow. You don't think anyone else saw it, eh?' 'Well, I am sure that Tom (the old card-room waiter) didn't, for he asked me what was the strange gentleman's name, that he might put it down in the book.'

When I look back upon my life immediately and for some years after my marriage it seems—or perhaps I should say it ought to have been—an ideal one; I had enough for our needs, and whatever I made by my pen was an extra, and I delighted in my work as much as others in their play.

We became acquainted with the most picturesque parts of the

country in the search for a residence, and when tired of it we went elsewhere.

Youth, a breeze 'mid blossoms playing  
Where hope clung feeding like a bee,  
Both were mine; life went a-maying  
With youth, and love, and poesy.

It is only when we become old and ill, and 'one ceases to be eager' about anything, that we can estimate the truth and pathos of the poem that contains those lines. It pictures for us as no other poem does, save the 'Tears, Idle Tears' of Tennyson, that crown of sorrows, the remembrance of happier things. How pathetic is the writer's pretence of ignoring it:—

O youth! for years full many and sweet  
'Tis known that thou and I were one;  
I'll think it but a fond deceit,  
I cannot think that thou art gone.

Thy vesper bell hath not yet tolled,  
And thou wert aye a masker bold.  
Life is but thought, so think I will  
That youth and I are housemates still.

How vain, however well meant, are the efforts to extol old age and the advantages of a protracted existence which only gives us a longer time for melancholy comparison! How destitute of consolation is the argument that we have had our day, and should now be content, among other things, to 'go wooing in our boys'—a thing that can never be done by proxy. I confess, however, I had my share (though not, I protest, what is termed in the play my 'whack') of the joys of youth, and especially as regards the pitching our tent at will in the greenest pastures. But as time went on and flocks and herds increased but slowly, and our family very fast, my face was turned towards that city which, from the time of Whittington, has always to sanguine natures seemed paved with gold. Then, instead of camping under the greenwood tree, we took lodgings in London. Our first experience in this way was in strong contrast to the Arcadian bowers we had been accustomed to—a drawing-room floor in a genteel street running down into Hyde Park, where, whatever else was wanting, I found 'copy' enough.

We had not been there many days when an altercation between our landlady—yellow as a guinea and dirty as a Scotch bank-note—and her milkman 'forced itself,' as Mrs. Cloppins said, 'upon my ear.'

'Everybody is getting out of patience with you and your artful ways,' he said. 'Your landlord is going to put in the bailiffs on Monday morning, and if he were not, I would do it myself. The milk you have had from me without payment for your lodgers is past belief: you might have bathed in it.'

This picture of toilet luxury in connection with this lady was even more appalling than the threat of legal proceedings. I concluded it, however, to be Eastern metaphor; but as to the bailiffs, I thought the statement only too likely to be solid fact. I therefore took such measures as were in my power for self-defence. It was on a Saturday that I received this warning, and Sunday I understood was a day of freedom from executions; but in those days the law permitted the goods of a lodger (otherwise than his personal raiment) to be seized for rent, so I took what little property of value we possessed in a portmanteau, and deposited it in friendly keeping. As it happened there was no execution, but plenty of other dramatic incident. One day the landlady showed my wife the most beautiful collection of shawls and gowns, which she offered to her at half their value. In any case they would have been beyond her means, but what naturally astonished her was how this impecunious female had obtained possession of them. Her story was that she had been lady's maid in a fashionable family, and that her old mistress and her friends were wont to give her their new clothes to sell for ready money while their husbands paid the bills. This was not a pretty explanation, but the truth of the matter was a great deal worse. A few days afterwards, returning home unexpectedly, I found in my little smoking-room on the ground-floor a number of bags and boxes, which I afterwards discovered had been 'conveyed' from a neighbouring railway station; and indeed it turned out that I had been so fortunate (from the 'copy' point of view) as to have taken lodgings at the principal receiving-house for stolen goods in that neighbourhood.

The first book of tales I ever published ('Stories and Sketches') contained one called 'Blobbs of Wadham,' the foundation of which is the accidental likeness of two strangers to one another. This was the case with another Trinity man, whom I had never seen, and myself. Not only was I often addressed by persons who took me for him, but people used to ask, *à propos* of nothing, whether I knew So-and-So. I remember making a considerable impression upon a chance passenger in a railway train

on the Cambridge line, who was staring at me rather hard, by suddenly observing 'No, sir, I do not know Mr. So-and-So.' It had been the very question he was going to ask me, but my anticipating it seemed to him so uncanny that he got out at the next station. Mr. Sherlock Holmes had not at that time been heard of. When I came to know my double I saw but little resemblance between us except that we both wore an eyeglass; but I believe no one does see any likeness to himself in anybody, so true it is that after having beheld one's natural face in a glass one straightway forgets what manner of man he is. The exception was Narcissus, which proves the rule.

Another humorous incident on the same railway line was as follows:—I was travelling up to town with two undergraduate friends, A. and B., the former of whom was a particularly shy man. We wanted to play whist, but disliked dummy; and the only other man in the carriage was a very High Church clergyman, as we knew by what was then called his M.B. waistcoat. B., however, cut the cards and shuffled them, and looked at him appealingly; while A. murmured, 'Don't! don't! he will think we want to play the three-card trick.' We two, however, were resolute. At last it was agreed that we should draw lots who should ask him to play, and the lot fell upon poor A. I can see him now, pink and palpitating, as he made his plaintive request. 'Well, of course,' said the parson, 'that is just what I have been waiting for.' And I remember that he won our money.

In those early days the three-card trick was not the national institution it has since become: the 'gentlemen of the road' at that time used the three thimbles. The Cambridge line was much infested by these persons till cleared of them by a well-known personage, whom I will call Mr. Hunt. He was a London money-lender of great disrepute, whom some of my young friends had dealings with, and perhaps he resented that the sovereigns, which ought by rights to have been his, found their way into these rascals' pockets. At all events he undertook the (to him) unusual rôle of the guardian of youth and public benefactor. Mr. H. was a tall and powerful man, but had the agile fingers of a conjurer, and thimble-rig was child's play to him. Attired richly with studs and chain, and with an agricultural cast of countenance, his entrance into their compartment was gladly welcomed by the three rogues. After a modest interval the thimbles were produced, and he lost a pound or two; then, pretending to be



'pricked,' as the gamblers call it, he offered to bet five-and-twenty pounds that he would discover the pea. The money was staked on both sides and put on a vacant seat. Then Mr. Hunt said, after an apparently careful inspection, 'The pea is there,' and there it was under the thimble. Then he seized the bank-notes, crammed them into his pocket, and produced a life preserver. 'Whoever touches me,' he remarked, 'is as good as dead.' The three sharpers had the sense to perceive that he was in earnest, and they were also astonished and demoralised by what they had witnessed; for nobody knew better than themselves that there had been no pea. Mr. Hunt also knew it, and had brought one with him to supply the deficiency. They never troubled the Cambridge line again.

Mr. Hunt figures in one of my short stories called 'Amalek Dagon.' Perhaps the facts on which one or two of my fictions were founded may have some interest. The first short story, or about the first, I ever wrote—a very short one called 'Change for Gold'—was founded on a very curious circumstance in the life of Beckford, communicated to my informant by the old Duke of Hamilton. When Beckford had exhausted Art and Pleasure he had a morbid passion for new sensations, and found one by a strange accident in an intending suicide. He was a young man, with a wife and child, once in good circumstances, but reduced by poverty to great straits. He had come to the conclusion that his wife, whom he had married contrary to the wishes of her family, would be better provided for if he were out of the world; but, at all events, life had become intolerable to him. Beckford paid him a sum yearly, which placed them in comparative affluence, upon the understanding that he should disappear and never see them again. Twice a year he visited his patron to describe his feelings as a voluntary exile from home and kin, and afford him a study, as it were, of a human document. If I remember right, he eventually broke his word (which he ought never to have given) and escaped from this strange slavery.

'Blondel Parva' is a tale of life assurance, founded on some curious facts that took place in Edinburgh in the early part of the century. The clothes of a merchant of high repute were found on the shore of the Forth, and it was concluded that he was drowned. He was very popular, and his family, who were much attached to him, were greatly sympathised with; and the more

so since they were left far worse provided for than had been supposed. He had, however, insured his life for a very large amount, which secured them competence. By help of this money and his own exertions, the eldest son in course of time amassed a large fortune. Many years afterwards two of the judges were walking across the North Bridge in Edinburgh when they were accosted by a beggar. One of them gave him something, and excused himself to the other for such injudicious charity on the ground 'that the old fellow was so like poor F.'

'My dear friend,' said the other gravely, 'I never forget a face. That was F. himself.'

And so it turned out. F. had pretended to commit suicide in order to save his family from ruin; and after years of voluntary exile, during which he suffered great privations, he had been unable to resist the temptation of once more beholding his children before he died. He had no intention of revealing himself to them, and fancied that no one else could recognise him, but he felt that the judge had done so, and therefore made himself known to them. He died at home a few weeks after his return: the money obtained from the life assurance office was repaid with interest, and the matter was hushed up. Curiously enough this very case was used as a plot by another novelist only a year or two ago; and the scene of it, no doubt by misadventure, actually laid where it had occurred, in Edinburgh.

'Carlyon's Year' is the story of a man who had only one year given him by the doctors in which to live. A friend tells me that it much disappointed a sporting gentleman of his acquaintance who had been led to suppose from its title that it was the history of a Derby favourite.

'A Perfect Treasure' was taken from the story of the Nancy diamond; it was entrusted after the battle to a faithful servant, who fell among thieves, and, to secure its safety, swallowed it. It is probable that no family retainer has ever been regarded with such solicitude for the quarter of a century as he was. The first cheap edition of the work was brought out with a picture by Sir John Millais, the woodcut of which, I suppose, happened to be in the publisher's possession, and seemed to him to illustrate the subject ('A Perfect Treasure'), for it was a little baby in its mother's arms.

When I re-peruse the little story, 'How Jones got the Verse Medal,' I cannot resist the conviction that the original of that

fortunate young person was Tennyson. I heard the tale while I was an undergraduate, and wrote the story before years had brought the sense of reverence; and it must be confessed that 'Timbuctoo' is a poem that does not itself preclude levity. The examiners for the year (as I heard the tale) were three—the Vice-Chancellor, who had a great reputation but a violent temper, and did not write very well; a classical professor who knew no poetry that was not in a dead language; and a mathematical professor. It was agreed that each should signify by the letters 'g' and 'b' (for 'good' and 'bad') what he thought of the poems, and the Vice had the manuscripts first. When the mathematical professor got them he found 'Timbuctoo' scored all over with g's, and though he could not understand why, nor indeed the poem itself, did not think it worth while, as he afterwards said (though the fact was he was afraid) to ask the Vice his reasons; so he wrote 'g' on the poem also. The classical professor thought it rather funny that both his predecessors should admire so unintelligible a production; but, as he said, 'he did not care one iota about the matter,' and so wrote 'g' on it also; and as no other poem had three 'g's,' the prize was unanimously awarded to the author of 'Timbuctoo.' After all was over, the three examiners happened to meet one day, and the Vice, in his absolute fashion, fell to abusing the other two for admiring the poem. They replied very naturally, and with some indignation, that they should never have dreamt of admiring it if he himself had not scored it over with 'g's.' "'G's,'" he said, 'they were "q's," for queries, for I could not understand two consecutive lines of it.'

'The Blankshire Thicket' was Maidenhead thicket, near which I lived in my youth. It had an almost unequalled reputation for highway robbers. A farmer (I think his name was Cannon) was stopped one night as he drove home from Reading market and robbed by two footpads. He was a powerful and courageous man, but as he had no weapon he had to give up his money-bag. As he drove along, full of bitter rage, he suddenly remembered that under the seat of his gig was a reaping-hook that he had taken to Reading to be mended. Then he drove on to the thicket (which is, in fact, a common), and making a long detour came into the road again half a mile or so on the Reading side of where he had been stopped before. The footpads, as he anticipated, were still at their post, waiting for more prey, and of course they took the farmer for a fresh victim. So amazed, however, were they to see

their old friend again that they 'hardly knew where they was,' as he expressed it, when he leapt out of the gig and laid about him with his cutlass (as they doubtless thought it) with such effect that one was left for dead upon the road and the other took to flight. Upon the former the good man found his money-bag, and drove home rejoicing. He was a local hero for many a day, and none the less because it was whispered that he had found other moneys upon the person of his prostrate foe, and kept them as the spoils of war.

'The Calderton Arms' alluded to in the same story was the 'Orkney Arms' (or Skindles), now so well known to all the river-loving public. The story goes that early in the century the landlord was a strong Radical, and could command a dozen votes; but his prosperity had a sad drawback in it in the person of his only son, a good-for-naught. During a certain Blankshire election a Tory solicitor was staying at the inn, and had occasion to go to London for the sinews of war. His gig was stopped on his way back on Hounslow Heath by a gentleman of the road.

'I have no money,' said the lawyer, with professional readiness, 'but here is my watch and chain.'

'You have a thousand pounds in gold in a box under the seat,' was the unexpected reply; 'throw back the apron.'

The lawyer obeyed, but as the horseman stooped down to take the box the lawyer knocked the pistol out of his hand and drove off at full gallop. He had a very quick-going mare, and before the highwayman could find his weapon, which had fallen into some furze, was beyond pursuit.

The next morning the lawyer sent for the landlord. 'Yesterday,' he said, 'I was stopped on Hounslow Heath. The man had a mask on, but I recognised him by his voice, which I can swear to. I knew him as well as he knew me. You had better speak to your son about it, and then we will resume our conversation.'

The landlord was quite innocent of his son's intended crime, but he had reason to believe him capable of it. He went out with a heavy heart, and when he came back his face showed it. 'Well,' he said, with a sort of calm despair, 'what steps do you intend to take, sir, in this matter?'

'None to hurt an old friend, you may be sure,' answered the lawyer; 'only those twelve votes you boasted about must be given to our side instead of yours.' Which was accordingly arranged.

The story of 'Double Gloucester,' in ridicule of the absurd

custom, now fallen into disuse, of naming parts of the same street, and even opposite sides of it, by the points of the compass, had an actual illustration in my own experience. We lived at that time in Gloucester Crescent, Hyde Park; in a line with it was Gloucester Crescent North. A friend from the country, who had come up to act as godmother to one of our children, arrived at the right number but in the wrong Crescent, where lived two maiden ladies. She was ushered into the drawing-room, where they received her a little stiffly. She took them for London friends of the family, and that, like herself, they were a little early for the ceremony. By way of conversation she observed, 'Well, and how is the dear baby?' They protested, with a natural indignation, that there was nothing of the kind on the premises.

On another occasion, when we gave a juvenile party, a totally unknown little boy made his appearance—and it was a very fine one—among the other guests. His attire was splendid, both as regarded colour and texture, and he was not the least dismayed at finding himself among strangers. His nurse had left him at the wrong party, but it is impossible he could have made himself more at home had he been at the right one. He did not know his own name or address, but referred all inquiries to 'Nursey.' In consideration of his position he was allowed to do exactly what he liked, and he dominated the whole company in the most absolute fashion. We should have more appreciated the humour of the situation if we had been quite sure of his being called for, which did not happen till long after the other little guests had departed, so that we had more than a *mauvais quart d'heure* upon his account. The idea of any permanent addition to our family at that time was a serious one. Upon explaining to his attendant that a mistake had been made, she was so good as to say that if her little master had enjoyed himself it mattered nothing.

'The Savan Triumphant' was an experience of my cousin, Frank Buckland, who himself related it to me. He belonged to a fishing club on the Thames, which held its meetings once a week, and the chairman for the evening was the one who had caught the heaviest fish. On one occasion a Mr. Jones was the fortunate individual; it was the first time that he had earned the honour, and he was very proud of it, though his prize fish had only been a barbel. One of the members of the club was unable to stay to dinner, and asked Jones for the fish to take home with him, as it

was not to form part of the *menu*. He consented, though rather unwillingly, and nothing was heard of the matter till the next meeting, when Buckland chanced to be present.

'A curious thing happened about that barbel which Jones gave me last Saturday,' observed its recipient; 'it had swallowed a little pike.'

'You will not make me swallow *that*,' observed Buckland confidently. 'A barbel could not do it; its conformation forbids it.'

'You may theorise as you like,' returned the other, 'but I must be allowed to believe the evidence of my senses. I saw the jack taken out of the barbel with my own eyes.'

'I *don't believe* it,' said Buckland.

The conversation, in fact, was growing very warm when Jones broke in with, 'Don't quarrel, gentlemen; you are both of you in the right. The fact is I was so afraid that somebody might catch a heavier fish than I that I poked the little jack down the barbel's throat with my fishing-rod, to make him weigh more.'

'An Arcadian Revenge,' which reads farcically enough, had its origin not only in real life, but in high life, the principal, though passive, actor in it being a member of the Royal Family. It was, of course, an object of ambition to his county neighbours to get him to visit them, in which some succeeded and some did not. The A.'s were among the fortunate ones, and, after the most ingenious intrigues, got him to promise to attend one of their lawn-tennis parties. The B.'s, who were their nearest neighbours, were less ingenious, or had less good luck, and he declined their overtures, which naturally made them furious with the A.'s. It happened that though both families had very extensive gardens, their tennis-grounds were contiguous, and, indeed, only separated by an iron fence. When the party to meet His Royal Highness (to which the B.'s had not been asked) adjourned from the luncheon-table to play their game, they found the B.'s servants hanging the clothes from the wash on lines in the neighbouring tennis-ground—a spectacle which reduced the A.'s from the highest state of social exultation they had ever enjoyed down to the lowest condition of despondency and shame. His Royal Highness, though short-tempered, was good-natured, and pretended not to see the various articles of underclothing, which an unfortunately high wind made unusually conspicuous; but when one of them escaped from its pegs and settled, like a gigantic bird, on the guest of the afternoon, he used—like the mother of Lady Vere de Vere's friend

—some words that 'scarce were fit for her' (or anybody else) 'to hear,' and the party broke up in great disorder.

It is very seldom that in biographies any mention is made of a class of persons who have, nevertheless, a good deal to do with our lives, and have the power to a considerable extent of making them pleasant or otherwise—namely, our domestic servants. In these humble memoirs at least they shall find a place.

Folks talk of faithful servants nowadays as if the breed had died out years ago. This is not my experience, and I have had a large one. It is not quite true, perhaps, that good masters and mistresses make good servants, or at least not so true as it used to be, because in these days there is a desire for independence and a dislike of subordination in the lower classes which of old did not exist; but if employers behave themselves as they should do, and show consideration and sympathy, both parties meet in general with their reward. The first cook we ever had had been a kitchenmaid in a private hotel which had been our home for some months. In a small way she was a born artiste as regards culinary matters, but that was not her highest merit: she was the most loyal and faithful creature it is possible to imagine, of extraordinary simplicity, and yet of an amazing cunning which was always put in practice for our advantage. An example of the former of these attributes was given in the first few months of our acquaintance. An esteemed bachelor friend, C., had been staying with us for a few days, and on the morning of his departure Mary came into the drawing-room and deposited five shillings in my wife's lap. She was not only the cook, but could turn her hand to anything, and was as well known to all our guests as the parlourmaid, who, with a nurse, made up at that time all our little household; still, she had never before figured as a source of income, and the sight of those five shillings astonished their recipient a good deal. It turned out that in the hotel she had come from it was understood that any 'vails' she received should become the property of her employer, and C. having given her five shillings, she had hastened to lay that donation at the feet of her mistress. It was quite difficult to persuade her that they were her personal perquisites.

On one occasion our kitchen chimney took fire, and almost before the crowd could collect she had got on the roof and stopped the conflagration with a wet blanket. When the firemen arrived with their engine she met them with her sweetest smile (she was



not a plain cook in any sense, but a very pretty one), and assured them that in our house, at least, no accident of the kind they were in search of had taken place.

'Why on earth did you do that, Mary?' inquired her mistress.

'Why because, ma'am,' she replied, not without some contempt in her tone, 'if I had not sent them somewheres else they would have charged you a guinea.' Of course she was morally in the wrong, but in the service of her master and mistress (bless her) she had no scruples.

When she felt herself to have been wronged, she was the most resolute of women. It was her custom in the summer time in London to go twice a week, as early as five o'clock or so, to Covent Garden, and to come back in a cart laden with every sort of commodity of the best and cheapest for the maintenance of our household. One morning she came back almost immediately in a violent passion, with an eloquent account of her having been chucked under the chin and kissed by a policeman in the Edgware Road. Master, she said, would of course see her righted, but until that was done not a stroke of work would she put her hand to.

Master did not like the job, but he knew his Mary too well to attempt any opposition, and to Marylebone Police Office he took his steps.

The inspector was very civil, but thought the charge unfounded; suggested even that the young woman might be hysterical (fancy our Mary hysterical!) and recommended that the matter should be dropped. I quite agreed with him, but assured him such a course was impossible. 'Very good,' he said, 'I'll have the men brigaded at eight o'clock to-night, and the young woman can come and look at them and identify the offender—if she can.'

At eight o'clock Mary and I went to the station. There were about fifty policemen in two lines, waiting to receive her like a guard of honour: there was a space between them, so that she might walk in front of each, and read 'between the lines' if she could for the right man. The force giggled a little, but even that did not disturb our heroic cook. She marched slowly up one line and down the other, said she was 'not quite certain,' and asked leave to do it again. This time she stopped, like a learned pig at a letter, exactly opposite to one 'intelligent officer,' scrutinised him closely, and then observed, 'That is the man.' And

it *was* the man. It was admitted that he had been on duty in the Edgware Road at the time in question, and we were promised that he should be duly punished for his offence.

The end of Mary, so far as we were concerned, was sad and mysterious. She left us after fourteen years, at the request of her aged parents, and though we wrote to her and to them again and again, we received no reply of any sort.

We have not always had such nice cooks as Mary—few people have—though on the whole we have been fortunate with them; but on one occasion we had a *chef* of the first class, though only for a short time. We had been a good deal troubled about cooks at that time; had had a succession of them, each worse than the other as regards the art she professed. We had been obliged to keep them for a month, and had only not been poisoned. At last I said, ‘Never will we engage a cook again till she can show how she can cook.’ They had all assured us that they could send up dinners ‘fit for a prince;’ perhaps they did, but if so princes must be easily satisfied. This resolution of mine very much thinned the ranks of the candidates who applied for the situation. They said it was a humiliating proposal, and one which no one who respected herself would submit to. If they said they could cook, not to believe it was throwing doubt on a lady’s statement. At last one came who positively smiled at having to prove her words; she had the best credentials as to her culinary capacities, and assured us that they fell short of her merits. I so far believed her as to ask some people to dinner who really knew what a good dinner was (a knowledge, by-the-by, only possessed by a very few persons), and it was arranged that she was to have a guinea for her services. The guests arrived, and, being old friends, were informed of the circumstances, so they resolved themselves into a sort of committee of taste. The dinner was a perfect success; indeed, I have never sat down to a better one. We congratulated ourselves on having at last discovered a perfect treasure, who would live with us as long as life would last, though such excellent cooking would probably ensure exceptional longevity. When the feast was over and the guests departed, I told my man that I would pay the cook her guinea with my own hands, that I might compliment her upon her genius. ‘I think you had better not do that, sir,’ he replied. ‘Perhaps to-morrow morning she may be better.’ ‘Better? she could not be better!’ (I was still thinking of her only as regarded her art.) ‘What is the matter with her?’

'She is not in a fit state, sir, to take her wages.'

From what I knew of my man I felt from this description that she must be in a parlous state indeed.

'Do you mean to say she is intoxicated?'

'No, sir, intoxicated is not the word; she is lying dead drunk on the kitchen floor.'

It was quite true, for I went down and looked at her. She had had a quantity of stout, and then a bottle of port wine, while she had been sending up the dinner; she said that 'constant support' was necessary to her during that responsible duty. And she had done her duty to the very last—a particular kind of roe on toast, of which I have still a grateful remembrance. Then this great artiste succumbed. She was really a *cordon bleu*, but so constituted that she had never held any situation beyond a month, during which (except in February) she had been drunk from thirty to thirty-one days: a brilliant genius, but with this little failing, like Sheridan.

Menservants are generally liked better by their masters than their mistresses; they are said to have the faculty of getting the length of their foot; and such is the innate selfishness of the male sex that so long as a man is personally well attended to he does not much mind how other folks are neglected. I am really afraid there is some truth in this, for though I have had some excellent menservants in my time, it is certain they have not all been so good as I thought they were. Jackson, a most grave and dignified character, was an example of this. He never unbent even to me, but he treated me at all times with kindly condescension. He had received his orders from another quarter to 'look after' his master, and he did so on one occasion with an unnecessary particularity, even to the extent of removing my hat from my head when I came indoors. Of course, I did not speak of it to *him*—if you had known Jackson you would have understood the impossibility of such a course—but I mentioned it elsewhere.

'Ah, you have found him out at last, have you?' was the enigmatical reply.

What could it mean? A few days afterwards, on the occasion of our giving a little dinner-party, I found out what it meant. On handing me the champagne, Jackson whispered confidentially in my ear, 'Will you have some sham?' and the moment afterwards saw by my face that he had betrayed himself to a too-

confiding master. Still, I could not but admire his subsequent behaviour—the conduct of a general who, though beaten, resolves not to be disgraced. He no longer trusted himself to wait at table, but remained at the sideboard, supporting himself slightly on his elbow, like a classical statue, and issuing his orders to the parlourmaid. Of course, the next morning he had to go. And here again he exhibited a fine sagacity, for, knowing that no worse could happen to him, he saw no reason why he should not make himself as happy as possible with the very cause of his undoing, and accordingly came up for his wages in a very advanced state of intoxication. He was still stately, but for a little lurch in his gait, and looked like a bishop threatened with sea-sickness.

‘There are your wages,’ I said coldly—‘your month’s wages—though you don’t deserve them.’

He had a slip of paper in his hand, the contents of which he compared with shaking fingers with the amount.

‘No, you don’t!’ he said, with his superior smile, and even a touch of his old pitying condescension. ‘I wants my *board* wages, and I don’t go till I gets ’em.’

Then he backed against the wall and leant against it—the six feet four of him—a fixture, as it seemed, for life. A policeman was sent for, but informed me that his duties must be confined to seeing that no unnecessary violence was used in expelling Jackson from the premises. Had not two undergraduate friends of the family happened to be in the house at the time he would probably have been with us now, but with the utmost willingness they seized the intoxicated Colossus by the shoulders and ran him into the street in half a minute. It is a great mistake to suppose (even though the police force refuse their assistance) that force is no remedy. Still, I was sorry for Jackson; his end—the being run out with such celerity—became him less than any portion of his sublime existence.

Strange customs have come and gone in my time, and social alterations of various kinds. At one time there was a craze for the revival of a certain custom of our ancestors in connection with hospitality. It had been resuscitated many years before by the ‘Young England’ party, and was once more dug up from its grave, like other

Usages thoroughly worn out,

The souls of them fumed forth, the hearts of them torn out.

This was the turning the junior members of the family into table-

waiters, to do more honour to the guests. This was done in some cases amongst people of the highest rank, and very distressing and embarrassing the guests felt it to be when the Lady Gwendoline or the Lady Ermengarde came round with the *entrées*. On one occasion, at the house of an eminent man, I noticed that when the dinner was announced his pretty daughter of sixteen had no cavalier allotted to her, and remarked to her on the wickedness of the omission.

'Oh, I am not going to dine,' she said, with a smile and a blush, 'but only to wait upon you.'

She evidently did not enjoy her office (which made the meal very unpleasant to me), but performed it with much grace and dexterity. Her brother, a public-school boy a year younger, resented the arrangement exceedingly; with a hand deep in one pocket and a dish in the other, he came lolling up with his 'sweetbread' and 'croquettes' as though he wished they might choke us, and I heartily forgave him for the aspiration. In some countries the custom is almost universal, but it certainly does not suit the English public-school boy.

Before the Crimean War there was a certain military club in London composed of very ancient members indeed; only a few colonels even were in it, and those of advanced age; the rest were generals and field-m Marshals. There is a legend that the hall-porter declined to admit a member who ran up the steps; such a thing was not only unparalleled, but seemed to him to be impossible. After peace was proclaimed there was an influx of comparatively young colonels into the club, whose advent was much resented by the aborigines. One of them told me of his adventures the first day. He was reading the *Times* on one of the standing newspaper-frames, when all of a sudden he found himself reading the *Morning Post*. An old general who wished to change his paper had quietly turned the thing round. My friend was not remarkable for good temper, and I asked him what he did under circumstances which even to my civilian mind seemed calculated to provoke a breach of the peace.

'Well,' he said, 'I got a good grip of the stand with both hands, and then whirled it round about forty revolutions to the second. The way in which that ancient veteran staggered back and fell into an armchair was a caution.'

The new arrivals were denied the first read of the evening papers. My colonel said, 'They were snatched away from us, sir.'

However, in the reading-room one afternoon he found only a dozen warriors, all with one arm, except one, who had but one leg. He said to himself, 'I shall get my paper to-day.' But when the servant came in with them the veteran with one leg took the whole of them from him, tucked them under his arm like a sheaf, and gave one to each of his friends, like a patent distributing-machine.

It was in this club that two members of the committee swore to blackball a candidate who had committed the heinous offence of being under sixty years of age. When they quitted town for the summer, they left word with the secretary that they should be telegraphed for if Colonel B.'s election came on. And in due time he did telegraph for them; one came from Dublin and one from Cornwall to keep B. out of the club. As it happened he got in, and the two veterans were wild with fury and the secretary.

'Indeed, gentlemen,' said the poor fellow, 'I couldn't help it. Indeed, but for you he would not have got in; for had you not put in an appearance on the committee there would not have been a quorum.'

It is curious that, while amateur acting is looked down upon, plays sometimes succeed in the drawing-room which fail in the theatre. This may be explained by the fact that the audience is more friendly; but in some cases the piece is really less well acted by the professionals. Wilkie Collins's 'Frozen Deep' was an example of this. When Charles Dickens and Company acted in it it was a great success, but on the boards it was a failure. I sometimes fondly think that my poor play, 'The Substitute'—a small thing (in a mere couple of scenes), but my own—came under the same category. It was received in a private house, where it was acted well and carefully, with every mark of favour, but failed—and deserved to fail—upon the stage. It was there played very vulgarly, whereas it required very delicate treatment. The plot was, I believe, original. A rich old English bachelor, Mr. P., engages himself in Paris to a young lady of fashion, who jilts him on the wedding-day. He has written home describing her various accomplishments to his friends, and the disappointment is a very bitter one. Out of pique he at once marries the housemaid at the hotel, who has been very good to him. The fun consists in his introducing her at home as his original *fiancée*, and in her successful efforts to support the character, accomplishments and



all. If it was not funny, I don't know what fun is; and yet—well, no matter, the British stage was the loser, for

I was so disgusted  
That I took and cussed it,  
And did not try again.

What was rather singular, I rewrote it as a story, which was popular enough, when half a dozen persons wrote to me to ask permission, on account of its dramatic character, to adapt it for the stage, where it had already run for six weeks (at the Court Theatre, but with a scratch company and in the off season) without attracting the least attention. As Mr. Brummell's valet observed of his master's neckcloths, 'this was one of our failures.'

I notice among recent publications 'The Religion of a Literary Man.' This ought to be very interesting, for hitherto men of letters have thought with Thomas Hood that 'faith and prayers are among the privatest of men's affairs.' It is said that Charles Dickens left behind him a record of his views upon spiritual things, but only intended for the use of his children, and not for publication. Leigh Hunt has given us 'The Religion of the Heart,' a book that deserves to be better known, if only because it is typical of the faith of a great many cultured persons, and full of tenderness and charity. As to orthodoxy, I have never met with it in any man of letters, even though he may nominally have belonged to some established sect. It is quite curious how, as regards this class at least, the clergy misunderstand the causes of those various conditions of the human mind which they denounce under the common term of 'infidelity.' The days when the publication of the 'Evidences of Christianity' acted as a panacea for it are over; men's doubts are no longer historic doubts. 'Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief,' is as common a cry with many of us as ever, but except with a few scholars the historical question has comparatively slight interest, as compared with 'the riddle of the painful earth'—what seems amiss in the moral government of the world. Nor do the old stock phrases about the 'Origin of Evil' and the Immutable Laws of Order or of Nature produce much effect upon modern minds. The question that puzzles *them* is put further back, and inquires, Who is responsible for the laws? It seems to them impossible that omnipotence and benevolence in combination can permit the outrageous crimes and cruelties that go on every day in the world. The



Powers of Evil do not seem to be, at all events for the present, subjugated to those of Good.

This, of course, has always troubled men's minds, but not so much as of late years, when the condition of other people has begun to awaken sympathy. It is quite extraordinary how callous even the most religious persons in the past have often been to the miseries of their fellow-creatures, both in this world and the next. They have, indeed, expressed their gratitude for being safe and sound themselves, but not without a feeling of complacency that others are not so fortunate. It is this callousness which has rendered the man of letters—impulsive and sensitive, soft-hearted yet easily moved to indignation, and charitable even towards the sins he is not inclined to—unorthodox and something more. There may be in him a want of submissiveness to the Divine Will, and certainly of that unquestioning faith which is the comfort of so many souls, but there is no lack of human love and sympathy; and the man who loves his fellows, we are told, is very near to loving his Creator. At all events, the feeling I have described seems to me to have more or less pervaded the minds of almost all men of letters with whom I have conversed upon spiritual things. Because literary men are not as a rule churchgoers, they are often considered irreligious or as complete Gallios in the matter; but this is not at all my experience of them, and I have lived in their midst for nearly half a century.

A very distinguished member of the clergy used to say, with those half-shut eyes that always showed when his vein of humour was touched, and which caused it to be said of him that he 'never saw a happy moment': 'What strikes one as so queer is that belief in their particular dogma is made the essential point of all sects, all of which save one—and perhaps even that—*must* be wrong.'

Who damns every creed but his own  
Must look for a limited Heaven,  
And is like a man laying long odds  
When the long odds to him should be given.

It never seems to strike a theologian that his calculation is contrary to the doctrine of chances.

Before I end, let me say a word or two more about my much-maligned profession. That use is second nature is a common truism, yet few people, I imagine, have had it brought home to them more forcibly than myself. The question has often been put to me by those who have been good enough to take an interest

in my writings: 'How do you manage, when you are ill or out of spirits, to write in the same unmistakably cheerful strain as usual?' I have often wondered myself, but without consciousness of the difficulty thus suggested. In times of trouble of many kinds, of severe physical ailments, of domestic bereavement, and even with death under the very roof, my pen, when I found myself at my desk, has turned to ordinary matters with perfect facility, and treated them in its habitual airy manner. It may not be a good manner, but it has become my own, and misery itself has no power to make it sad. I write these very lines in the acutest pain from rheumatic gout in my gnarled fingers. Yet, after all, how slight is this moral victory of second nature compared with that she displays in physical matters! A man of middle age, with whose family I am acquainted, found one of his eyes affected, as he thought, by reading small print at night, and applied to a famous oculist for advice. He examined him very carefully, and presently inquired whether he found any inconvenience from the other eye—the right one.

'None whatever,' was the reply.

'Still,' said the oculist, drily, 'it is very important for you to preserve the sight of your left eye, inasmuch as you have never seen with the other since you were born.'

There was some inherent defect in the retina which forbade it, and yet up to the age of five-and-forty this man had not discovered that he had not two eyes like other people. The fact is certain, though it has been justly remarked that he could never have winked with his left eye or he would have found himself in darkness.

As to the calling of Literature, which has been so much abused of late by some of its own followers, if I were to live twenty lives I would choose no other profession. It is the brightest and most genial of all of them, and, so far at least as my experience goes, the most free from jealousies and acrimonies. There are times, of course, when one would like to sentence a critic to be put to death 'to slow music,' but I have never felt inclined 'to put my knife'—unless it was the paper-knife—into any of my brother authors. They are very pleasant company, as kindly friends as can be found, and more inclined to look upon one's faults with tenderness than what are invidiously termed the respectable classes. The pursuit of letters makes us friends all over the globe, but it does not lead to fortune. Leisure in old age has been unhappily denied me. I

suppose without vanity I may say that, as regards popularity, I have been in the first dozen or so of story-tellers ; but my gains have been small indeed when compared with anyone in the same position in any other calling. A judge and a bishop get 5,000*l.* a year and a retiring pension. I have been exceptionally fortunate in receiving such small prizes as literature has to offer, in the way of editorships and readerships, but the total income I have made by my pen has been but an average of 1,500*l.* a year for thirty-five working years. As compared with the gains of Law and Physic, and, of course, of Commerce, this is surely a very modest sum, though it has been earned in a most pleasant manner.

THE END.

*THE SHADOW ON THE BLIND.*

HARBLEDON HALL had stood empty for seven years. For seven years no smoke had issued from its chimneys telling of the cheerful hearth within, no voice or laughter had been heard under its roof, no footstep coming or going across its threshold. A straggling growth of ivy and Virginia creeper that covered the walls and veiled the windows made the front of the house look as forlorn and neglected as the face of a sick man who has grown a ragged beard during a long illness. The window-sills were green with the drip of rain from the spouts choked with decaying leaves, and the brickwork was stained with dark patches of damp. The birds had built their nests undisturbed in every gable and projection of the roof, and in the wide chimneys, secure from danger of being smoked out of their comfortable quarters.

And within the house, though man had withdrawn his presence from it, other tenants were in possession. Rats and mice held revels in the empty rooms and passages, that resounded with the patter of their feet, the squeak of their voices, and the nibbling of their teeth. In the dead of night, bold as they had grown, they scared themselves by catching in wires that set bells ringing and echoing through the house, and an army of rats would rush helter-skelter down the great staircase, bounding over one another's backs in their panic, as we see them depicted in illustrations of the famous history of Whittington and his cat.

If desolation reigned in Harbledon Hall its gardens were returning to a state of savage nature, and the rank growth of weeds choked and overtopped the flowers and shrubs. No seeds had been sown, no lawns mown, no hedges clipped or tree or bush pruned in seven long years, and the once orderly gardens had become a tangled thicket where the fairy prince might seek the sleeping beauty. A bramble had sprung up by the sundial, and, clasping it in its thorny arms, threw its branches about it, effectually hiding it from the light of day. The stone basin of the disused fountain had become a nursery of young frogs, that hopped, swam, and croaked undisturbed, and nature was endeavouring to re-establish her sway where man had withdrawn his cultivating and restraining hand.

It was a radiant day in June. The hot sun poured down on the tangled overgrowth in the gardens of Harbledon Hall, the birds were in a perfect riot of song, and a south-west wind rocked them on the bough. Even the old forsaken house on such a day wore its least sombre aspect. One could imagine there had been happy household life within its walls, and it was possible to conceive that they might again resound to the laughter and voices of children at play.

Some such thought as this must have entered the mind of an elderly gentleman driving by in an open carriage, with his wife, a pale grey-haired lady, seated beside him. Mr. Stackpoole was a cheerful, energetic man of sixty years of age, of strong likes and dislikes and sudden impulses. As he caught sight of the wide front of Harbledon Hall with its red gables glowing in the sun, its confused mass of creepers almost hiding the lower storeys from view, he told the coachman to draw up at the iron gates at the entrance.

'This is a very picturesque house, my dear; I should like to have a look at it,' he said to his wife; 'it may be the kind of place we are in search of,' and he alighted from the carriage as nimbly as a young man to read the notice painted on the weather-stained board fastened to the gates—'For admission to view these premises, apply to Mr. Judd, sexton, by the church.' Mr. Stackpoole returned to the carriage and bade the coachman drive to the church, the tower of which they could see embowered among trees, apparently not more than a quarter of a mile distant. As they drove he continued, 'I like the look of the place very much. I am sure I could do something with it. I should just enjoy setting to work upon it to call order out of chaos, and in six months I would undertake to effect an entire transformation in the house and grounds and make it one of the prettiest places in the neighbourhood. What do you think, my dear? Hey?'

The frail-looking elderly lady thus addressed made but a faint rejoinder, and her husband's sanguine enthusiasm by no means communicated itself to her. Harbledon Hall was the sixth old house to which Mr. Stackpoole had taken a fancy in the last ten years, and fallen out of love with as quickly, after exercising his ingenuity in putting it in perfect order and living in it for a short time. It was his diversion, now that he had retired from business and had nothing particular to do, to hunt up old country houses, put them in thorough modern repair and working order,

live in them just long enough to induce his wife to hope that he had pitched his tent finally, when the demon of unrest would break out in him once more, and he was off again on the old quest.

This hunting of houses, catching them, and then letting them go that he might pursue game of the same kind elsewhere was naturally more entertaining to Mr. Stackpoole than it could be to his wife and daughter. But the elder lady was patient and philosophic, and when her daughter said petulantly, 'Oh, Mamma, what a shame it is that we have to be dragged about the country like this! We have not been a year in this lovely house, and Papa is tired of it already, and looking out again for some tumble-down old place to put that in good order, and leave it too, I suppose!' Mrs. Stackpoole would say, 'Never mind, Ella. Papa must do as he thinks best. The excitement and interest he finds in frequently changing house are necessary to him now that he has done with business; and remember, my dear, he has no home occupations to pass the time like you and I have.' But Ella Stackpoole was now married and settled in a home of her own, and the only other child, a son, was stationed with his regiment in Malta.

Therefore it was that when Mr. Stackpoole became suddenly interested in the appearance of Harbledon Hall his wife was unable to feel any enthusiasm on the subject. Their last home had been in Cornwall, where, after six months spent in its most westerly corner, Mr. Stackpoole discovered what everyone else had always known, that he was in a decidedly rainy part of England. He could scarcely have been more astonished at the quantity of rain that fell if it had been in Egypt, and he fled to London to make that his headquarters while he looked about for an old house to suit his fancy in the drier county of Surrey.

And on this bright June day he and his wife were driving through the fair country house-hunting, and the more dilapidated a house looked, provided that his experienced eye saw capacities of improvement about it, the more attractive it appeared to Mr. Stackpoole, as affording wider scope for his particular form of genius. His was a costly hobby, and strangers reaped the benefit of his lavish outlay on houses he perfected, tired of, and left so soon.

Mr. Judd, the sexton, was found without difficulty, for, indeed, he was a conspicuous object, sitting in a large armchair by his



cottage door reading the newspaper, and taking an occasional sip from a glass of cold brandy-and-water that stood beside him on the window-sill. He was a person of dignity in the village, accustomed to waste his own time and that of others; but Mr. Stackpoole hurried him off to the carriage as soon as he had found the keys, and compelled him to unwonted activity. 'The garden be a wilderness, sir,' said the old man, opening one of the great iron gates, 'and it's four 'ears since e'er an inquiry was made about the place.'

'It wouldn't be to everyone's taste, you see; it'll need a considerable outlay upon it before it is fit for habitation,' said Mr. Stackpoole complacently as he stooped to disentangle a briar from his wife's skirt. 'Who were the last tenants, and how long had they lived here?' he said, turning to the old man and asking two questions at once.

'Sir Roland Shawe and his family had it last, sir. They took the place on a twenty-one years' lease, and they left uncommon sudden when it had five years and more to run. There was a deal o' talk about what made 'em leave i' that way,' and Judd opened wide the front door as he spoke, and they entered a large, lofty hall, smelling mouldy as though there were vaults below.

'Folks did say there was reasons more 'n what they'd own up to, for a large fam'ly to turn out all of a sudden, as if they was running away from the plague,' and the old sexton looked mysterious and as though he longed to be questioned. Mr. Stackpoole, however, was too much interested in pacing the length of the dining-room to notice any hints he might throw out.

'My dear,' he said to his wife, who was resting on the low window seat, 'we will have the whole of this oak floor polished, and Turkish rugs laid down at intervals.'

'That is just what we did in our house in Cumberland,' said Mrs. Stackpoole gently, 'and if you remember you were not pleased with it when it was done'; then, turning to the old man: 'You were going to tell us why Sir Roland Shawe left so suddenly.'

'Forbid, ma'am, that I should say definite why he left, not knowing for certain,' said Mr. Judd, swelling with importance as he spoke. 'I never believe more 'n 'alf o' what I hear, and puts no faith in tales, whether master's or man's. But by what I can make out—and old Jimmy Judd can see through a stone wall as fer as most folks—I should say as ghosts was at the bottom of the whole kick-up.'



Mrs. Stackpoole smiled at the old man's mode of expressing himself, and then looked anxiously towards her husband, who laughed heartily, and they left the dining-room for the upstairs regions, which he was impatient to explore.

'They fled before ghosts, did they?' said Mr. Stackpoole, still laughing at the idea. 'If the house is supposed to be haunted I should like it all the better for its reputation,' and he swung open the door of a large, low room, with a deep projecting chimney-place and wide window letting in a flood of sunshine.

'This is certainly a very cheerful aspect,' said his wife, stepping to the window and looking out upon the wild garden enclosed by ragged yew hedges; 'there is nothing ghostly about this room, at all events!'

'Pooh! Ghosts indeed! those who believe in them deserve to see them,' said Mr. Stackpoole contemptuously. 'If we take the house this shall be your morning-room; you'll get plenty of sunshine, which is a great thing for you; and if I like the room under it I will have it done up for a business-room for myself.' And they wandered from cellar to attic of the big house, Mr. Stackpoole delighted with the possibilities of the place, and noting in his pocket-book the dimensions of the chief rooms and of the entrance-hall.

'At all events I shall inquire on what terms the house is to be let,' he said, after spending two hours in energetically inspecting the premises, and as he slipped five shillings into Mr. Judd's expectant palm, 'By the way, I have not asked who is the landlord?'

'The landlord, sir, be a many and not one,' and the old man named a well-known city company to which the property belonged.

'I've rented from landlords, and landladies, and trustees, but never yet from a company. It's all one to me, and I shall see their agent in town to-morrow.' Then Mr. Stackpoole took a farewell look at the room on the ground floor, immediately under the cheerful room at the head of the stairs that he had assigned to his wife's prospective use, and decided that it was exactly adapted to his requirements, after which they threaded their way back to the gates through the neglected maze of the garden.

'And how do you like the look of Harbledon Hall?' he asked his wife as he drove away; 'what do you think of the old place?'

'I confess that I was not very favourably impressed with it, though it is a handsome, well-built house, and might be made

very comfortable, no doubt. But it struck me with a kind of chill.'

'So would any place, my dear, that had been shut up for seven years. I feel it in my back now; I wish it may not mean an attack of lumbago for me.' Mrs. Stackpoole smiled at the literal interpretation of her words.

'I don't mean that kind of chill, but a sort of depressed, foreboding feeling that I have never had before in any of the houses you and I have been over together, and their name is legion.'

'Why, Anna, you don't mean to say that the tedious old sexton has frightened you with his gossip! It was merely some nonsense or other he had made up to increase his importance. If I take the place I shall put an army of workmen in in a week from now, and when next you see it, with good fires drying the rooms, windows bright and clean, and paperers and painters busy upon it, it will look very different, I can assure you. Any house that has been uninhabited as long as Harbledon Hall wears a forlorn look, but for all that I see the possibilities of it, and I could make it the prettiest place we have lived in yet.' And Mrs. Stackpoole felt certain that her husband would take the old house.

The following day, when Mr. Stackpoole saw the company's agent, he was surprised at the very moderate rent asked for the house. Whether he wished to take it on lease or as a yearly tenant, the sum demanded was small enough to arouse suspicion in the most unwary.

'Why do you ask such a low rent for a fine old place like that?' he asked.

'It is so much out of repair from standing empty so long, that I suppose the company is willing to submit to a certain loss, for the sake of having it inhabited again.'

'But with such a temptingly low rent, how is it that it has not been taken long ago?'

'There have been any number of applications for it.'

'Indeed! The old fellow in charge of the keys who showed me over the place yesterday said that no one had inquired about it for four years.' A peculiar expression passed over the agent's face, but it was not one of surprise.

'He said so, did he? I've had plenty of inquiries.'

'He certainly said so. He was a talkative old man, and anxious to impress us with the idea that Sir Roland Shawe left

Harbledon Hall suddenly, some considerable time before his lease was up, in consequence of an absurd notion that the house was haunted. Now, personally I care nothing about it, but my wife is sometimes nervous, and I thought I would ask you if you know anything of any unusual circumstances connected with his leaving so abruptly.'

'Judd is a chattering old fool! Did he tell you anything definite about it himself?' asked the agent.

'Nothing whatever, but he said some nonsense about ghosts driving them away from the place.'

'Of course there was an absurd story that got about at the time! It was some hocus-pocus with a magic-lantern, I believe, got up by the young fellows to frighten the servants, with pictures of a skeleton on a sheet hung up somewhere or other. The whole thing was a stupid practical joke, only too successful, for the scare spread to the ladies of the house, and of course Sir Roland had to leave; they made the place too hot for him,' and the agent laughed uproariously. 'I remember all about it now you come to ask me. The young Shawes got up the panic for their own purposes. They found the country too slow for them, they wanted to live in London, so with the simple apparatus of a magic-lantern and a sheet or blind they frightened the family back into town and got what they wanted. Naturally Sir Roland used not to speak of it when he found it out, for no one is proud of having been made a fool of. And now, my dear sir,' he said, assuming an air of great candour, 'you know as much about this childish folly as I do myself. It has been magnified into something wonderful till we've had that tempting property on our hands all these years in consequence.'

Mr. Stackpoole was pleased and amused with the agent's frank explanation of the basis of Mr. Judd's mysterious allusions, and he and his wife laughed at it together over their dinner. Mrs. Stackpoole was now willing that her husband should take Harbledon Hall, which he did as a yearly tenant, with the right of taking the property on a lease, if at the end of three years he felt inclined to prolong his stay.

Then began all the delightful bustle that Mr. Stackpoole's soul loved—the drying, warming, painting, lighting, decorating, and furnishing of the house; the taming and reclaiming of the garden; the stubbing up of old lawns and laying down of new turf; the cleaning and regravelling or weed-grown paths. Such

an army of workmen was engaged that Mr. Stackpoole calculated that in less than five months the house would be ready to go into, and the gardens be all clean, smooth, and bare in their winter tidiness. 'It must be finished by the middle of December,' he said, 'that I may keep Christmas here with my family; and if every man has done his work well, and is out of the house by the twelfth of December, I will give each one a bonus on his wages, and a Christmas supper to you all.'

No wonder that the workmen caught something of Mr. Stackpoole's enthusiasm, and that every time he brought his wife to see what was going on she was delighted with the progress made. All their friends were informed of the lucky find of the beautiful old house in Surrey, and invitations were issued long before for a series of entertainments, dances, and private theatricals that they intended to give at Harbledon Hall in the following January, when their daughter, Mrs. Beaumont, and her husband would be staying with them.

Shortly before Mr. and Mrs. Stackpoole removed to Harbledon Hall they were dining out one evening, and after the ladies had left the room and the gentlemen had rearranged their chairs comfortably and were seated at their wine, Mr. Stackpoole began on his favourite theme, the furnishing and repairing of the old house in Surrey. As most of those present had frequently heard him on the subject before, he was not much heeded, and prosed on without interruption till a tall, bald-headed gentleman opposite him caught the words Harbledon Hall and became an attentive listener.

'Harbledon Hall, did you say? Do you mean the old gabled, red-brick house three miles from Mendleton in Surrey? I hope no friend of yours is thinking of taking it.'

Mr. Stackpoole smiled. 'Not exactly a friend of mine, though probably I know him better than anyone else. I have taken Harbledon Hall myself and intend moving into it next December.'

'The deuce you do!' said the bald-headed gentleman, setting down his glass.

'I don't know why it should surprise you,' said Mr. Stackpoole.

'Surprise me? Certainly not. Only I thought that the house was empty and likely to remain so.'

'Surely it has stood empty long enough—for seven years. It requires an immense deal doing to it, of course, but I took a fancy to the place, and am putting it into thorough repair, introducing

the electric light among other modern improvements ; in fact, I am sparing no expense. Do you know anything about Harbledon Hall ?

‘I used to do. Sir Roland Shawe, the last tenant, is my brother,’ and the bald-headed gentleman spoke in a dry and uncommunicative manner. But a hint was not enough for Mr. Stackpoole.

‘Then you are the very person to tell me about an absurd story I have heard—it had something to do with a magic-lantern, I believe, some kind of scare the young people got up to pretend there were bogies in the house, and frighten their parents back to town, where they preferred to live. You see, I’ve heard all about it, and I only want it corroborating by a member of the family,’ and he laughed heartily, as though it were the best joke in the world. But the gentleman opposite him grew grave to severity, and said, ‘I am unable to understand your allusion to a magic-lantern performance which is supposed to have tried my brother’s nerves, and absurd is the last word applicable to the circumstances under which Sir Roland was compelled to leave Harbledon Hall.’

‘Then I must have been misinformed in the matter,’ replied the undaunted Mr. Stackpoole, whose curiosity was now thoroughly aroused. ‘As I am about to live in the house, will you not tell me the real circumstances, that I may be able to contradict the foolish stories that one hears ?’

‘Why should it be necessary for you to contradict gossip on the subject ? Sir Roland never mentions it. It is possible that some time you may learn for yourself why my brother left the house ; then I think you will be satisfied that he acted wisely, and if not, I should be sorry to prejudice you against Harbledon Hall.’ And the gentlemen rose to join the ladies, and Mr. Stackpoole remained in a state of mystification. Evidently something had happened to drive Sir Roland Shawe and his family from Harbledon Hall with which neither old Judd nor the agent was acquainted. What could it be ? For himself, so long as it was neither rats nor drains, he did not care ; but with his wife it was different. If she had the least inkling that there was anything uncanny about the house, she would refuse to go into it at the eleventh hour, or, if she went, would make a point of seeing a ghost the very first dark night.

But she must hear no silly talk about it. Any ghosts that former inhabitants of the Hall had imagined they saw was when

they went about the house starting at their own shadows by the dim light of oil-lamps. The electric light would put all that to rights. It was the best cure for such preposterous folly, and in its illumination Mr. Stackpoole felt that he should be more than a match for all the powers of darkness.

But shortly after meeting Sir Roland Shawe's brother an odd coincidence happened that drew his attention again to the subject of their conversation. Mrs. Stackpoole had written to her son at Malta telling him that his father had taken an old house in Surrey with which he had fallen in love, how beautifully he was fitting it up, that they expected to keep Christmas in it, and that it was at Harbledon Hall that they hoped to welcome him on his return to England. In reply Jack wrote, 'So my father is again on the move. Well, this time I am glad he is taking you to a thoroughly accessible place, and not to Cornwall or Cumberland. But is the old house he has taken a fancy to not far from Mendleton? I suppose there can't be two Harbledon Halls in the county, but it is odd if it is the house of that name I have lately heard something about. There was a young civilian out here for his health—he has gone to Egypt now—and he told me that his uncle, a Sir Roland Smith, or some such name, had been fairly driven out of an old house in Surrey by ghosts. I'm sure he called it Harbledon Hall, and he said that his uncle was not in the least a nervous man, but it was more than he could stand, and he had to leave. I wish now that I had asked him all about it, but he was such a dull chap nothing he said interested me, so I lost the chance of learning particulars. Don't you be timid, dear mother. Let me tackle the bogies when I come home; I should enjoy nothing better.'

Mrs. Stackpoole did not like this at all. It produced an eerie and creepy sensation, and her husband took care not to increase her discomfort by telling her of his conversation with Mr. Shawe.

'It is odd, my dear, very odd,' he said in his most cheerful tones, 'and we are obliged to confess that, somehow or other, someone or other received some sort of a fright at Harbledon Hall. Nothing can be more vague, and yet that is all that is known about it. A pity the whole silly business was not inquired into on the spot, for of course it would admit of a perfectly simple solution. Very likely one of the maids had supped rather more heavily than usual on cold pork, and in a paroxysm of indigestion



walked in her sleep; someone saw her in her white nightgown, took her for a ghost, screamed, and got up a scare—for it is always easier to cry out than to investigate. And there you have the whole history of a ghost story in a nutshell, my dear—in a nutshell.'

The workmen were punctually out of Harbledon Hall on the day agreed upon, and as punctually received their pay and their Christmas supper, and the house was ready for the reception of the new tenant, with the good wishes of all who had helped to prepare it for him. Mr. Stackpoole arranged that they should arrive after dark at Harbledon Hall, that he might surprise his wife with the electric light in every room and passage, and introduce her to her new home under its most cheerful and attractive aspect.

As they approached the house both Mrs. Stackpoole and her daughter exclaimed with delight, and Ella said it was too pretty to be real, it was like something on the stage. From every window of the house, from the basement to the garret, streamed the pure radiance of the electric light, undimmed by curtain or blind, sending shafts of light far into the surrounding darkness. From the porch the white light illumined the drive like a cold sunshine, and showed every pebble on the ground and every twig on the bare boughs.

'There, my dears,' said Mr. Stackpoole triumphantly, as he led his wife and daughter into the brilliant hall; 'this is how modern science drives away foolish fears of darkness by turning night into day. No one could be nervous or afraid of ghosts in a house lighted like this.'

'No, indeed—the thing would be impossible,' replied Mrs. Stackpoole, her daughter, and son-in-law in confident chorus.

Christmas was kept with much festivity at Harbledon Hall, and it was impossible to say who was most delighted with the house—the host or hostess, or the guests under its hospitable roof. Each was charmed with his own room, but Mrs. Stackpoole's morning-room was the general favourite, and afternoon-tea was frequently taken there in preference to the more stately drawing-room. The grandchildren played in the empty rooms upstairs on rainy days, and every evening watched the miracle of lighting the house with the electric light with breathless interest. They regarded Grandpapa as a light-producing wizard, so that something of awe was mingled with their wildest frolics, and they did not



dare to open the door of his own particular room, which was respectfully called the study, though its principal use was to smoke in, or to take a quiet nap before dinner.

It was the end of January, and the Stackpooles were daily congratulating themselves on their good fortune in meeting with a house so perfectly suited to all their requirements, when they wound up their New Year's festivities with a fancy ball. Several young people were staying in the house for the occasion who were to depart the day after the ball, leaving their host and hostess alone for the first time in their new house. Numbers of guests were coming from a distance, many of whom had accepted the invitation out of curiosity, as a dance afforded a good opportunity of spending a night under cheerful auspices in a house with the reputation of being haunted.

All their entertainments so far had been successful, but the last was to be the best, and the host and hostess threw their whole souls into the preparations to ensure its complete success. The room was charming, the floor perfect, the band that came from town the most renowned of the season. The costumes to be worn were of no special time or country, and the Stackpooles themselves set an example of reckless catholicity in the matter, the hostess being dressed as Queen Elizabeth, and her husband as an Admiral of the Fleet of to-day, while Mrs. and Mr. Beaumont figured respectively as a Japanese lady and Spanish matador. By the time that the guests had arrived, clad in the garb of all ages and countries, the ball-room appeared to contain such a motley throng as the Day of Judgment alone could bring together. Here an ancient Greek danced with a Swedish peasant, and the Black Prince with a female captain of the Salvation Army, and there a clown and a nun waltzed gaily past Mahomet and a ballet-girl.

The electric light was a greater novelty then than it is now, and the guests were loud in their admiration of the fairy-palace appearance of the house as they approached, and of its brilliance within. Mr. Stackpoole was as delighted as a child with a new toy, and led his friends about showing them how by merely turning a button on the wall he could plunge a room in darkness or flood it with radiant light.

Dancing was kept up with great spirit till the small hours, and as the clock in the hall chimed a quarter-past three the old house resounded to the half sad and wholly romantic strains of a waltz by Waldteufel. The guests who came from a distance had

begun to depart, and Mr. Beaumont stood in the porch laughingly seeing Lady Jane Grey and Flora Macdonald into their carriage. Just then a maid gave a message to one of the footmen to Mrs. Beaumont, who sat fanning herself near the door of the ball-room. 'If you please, ma'am, nurse says Master Harry is awake and crying with the music, and says he won't go to sleep till he sees you, ma'am.'

'Tell nurse I will come directly,' and, excusing herself to the lady who sat next to her, she slipped out of the room. In the hall she met her father as he was entering his study.

'I'm going to put this miserable encumbrance by,' he said, smiling and flourishing the Admiral's cocked hat, which he had gallantly carried the whole evening to his great inconvenience.

'And I am on my way to the nursery to see little Harry,' and Mrs. Beaumont ran upstairs, softly singing to the sweet music that floated from the ball-room. Mr. Stackpoole laid his hat on the table, and looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. 'A quarter-past three! I'm tired, and the young people ought to be. Heigh-ho! I'd rather give ten dinners than one dance,' and he yawned profoundly, sank into a low chair by the fire, stretched his legs out before him, and closed his eyes. Sleep fell upon him instantly, and for several minutes he was lost in its depths, light and sound had ceased to exist for him, his brain was steeped in silent darkness.

Mr. Beaumont still stood in the porch; the servants had returned to the house, and he was alone. It was a mild winter's night. He flung a cloak over his matador's costume and stepped into the open air. 'I sha'n't be missed for five minutes,' he said to himself, 'while I smoke a cigarette,' and he walked briskly along a broad path some thirty yards from the house, from which he had a perfect view of the front of Harbledon Hall. And very pretty its cheerful brightness looked against the dark background of star-set sky. Brilliant rays of light shot from the undraped windows, and those that had the blinds drawn down showed the outline of objects in the room thrown upon them in shadow, as clearly as from a magic-lantern.

Involuntarily he raised his eyes to the window of Mrs. Stackpoole's sitting-room, and stood rooted to the spot. Two figures as clearly defined as silhouettes were visible on the pure square of the blind—the shadows of an old man and a young man struggling together. From the shape of the heads George

Beaumont saw that they wore tie wigs, and there was the clearly-cut shadow of the ruffles at the wrists, and the younger and taller man wore a large Steinkirk with richly-laced ends round his neck. At first he thought that they were guests dressed in the costume of the early Georgian period, though how they had gone upstairs into that room, or why there was a deadly struggle between them, he did not know. But wonder and speculation was swallowed up in terrified interest as he watched the course of the brief conflict. The elder and shorter man, who stooped considerably, appeared to be unarmed, and seized the younger man by the throat, when he shook himself free, stepped quickly back, drew his sword, and, plunging forward on his right foot, ran his opponent through the body. He staggered backward and fell out of sight below the level of the window, and there remained only the shadow of the younger man in clear profile on the blind. He stood for a minute looking downward, and George Beaumont had time to observe the finely-cut features of a total stranger. Then he saw that he wiped the blade of his sword, turned and walked away, and his shadow passed out of sight, leaving the window-blind a blank, luminous square.

Indoors at the same time Mr. Stackpoole had been waked from his short sleep by a sound in his wife's sitting-room overhead, and he sprang to his feet with every faculty concentrated in listening. A noise as of chairs pushed back and upset on the polished floor, and a scuffling of feet as though two men were struggling together. Then a moment of silence, a loud stamp, and heavy fall that seemed to shake the ceiling, followed by deep groans. 'Good God! What can be the matter?' cried Mr. Stackpoole, and he rushed from the room into the hall. The front door stood open, though the inner glass doors were closed, and neither his son-in-law nor any servants were there. He stopped to call nobody, but ran upstairs to his wife's room just as his daughter came quickly down from the storey above with a white and terrified face. 'Oh, Papa, someone has just frightened me so, but whoever he is he is in there! I saw him go into Mamma's room a few minutes ago, and I'm so glad you've come, for I dare not follow him!' and without asking Ella of whom she was speaking, Mr. Stackpoole flung the door wide open and rushed into the room. No one was there. Not a chair or table displaced, and the electric light illuminating every corner of the room forbade the possibility of anyone being in hiding.

'It is the most extraordinary thing!' he exclaimed, wiping the perspiration of terror from his brow as he spoke; 'I would not have your mother know of it for the world!'

'Have you seen him too?' said his daughter faintly.

'Seen whom, child? Seen what? No, I've seen nothing, but I've heard enough to last me my lifetime. God forbid that I should hear it again!' and he looked about the room and under the table, fairly stupefied with amazement.

'He passed me on the stairs just as I came out of the night nursery,' said Mrs. Beaumont anxious to tell her experience without waiting to hear her father's. 'A tall young man ran quickly by me dressed in a blue coat, with ruffles at the wrists and a great laced cravat, and a wig tied with a ribbon at the back. He carried a long thin sword in his hand. At first I thought it was Arthur Newton, who wore a powdered wig like his this evening, but I remembered his coat was black and he left early. When I saw his face it was a stranger's, and he looked cruel and passionate. I followed him till I saw him go into this room and shut the door after him.'

'Then where the devil is he now?' said Mr. Stackpoole. 'This is some miserable practical joke, but I'll get to the bottom of it and be even with them yet—I'll get to the bottom of it!' and as he spoke the door that he had taken the precaution to close burst open, and his son-in-law entered in his matador's dress, pale and breathless, looking as if the bull had turned and given him chase.

'Oh, George, have you seen him too?' said his wife.

'Did you hear anything?' asked Mr. Stackpoole. 'Sit down, man; you are trembling like a leaf!'

'There were two of them, an old man and a young man, in this room a minute ago! In God's name, who were they, and why did not you stop them before murder was done?' he said excitedly.

Mr. Stackpoole grew quiet and self-collected at the sight of his son-in-law's agitation. 'Pull yourself together, George, and tell me what you mean. There is something up to-night that needs explaining.'

'But where are they? They were in this room, and if you were with them you must have witnessed what happened, or if you only came upstairs just now you must have met the young man leaving the room. The old man will never stir again,' and he lifted the tablecloth and looked under the table.

'How come you to speak confidently of who was in this room

a few minutes ago, when you were downstairs all the while?' asked Mr. Stackpoole.

'I was smoking a cigarette in the garden after seeing the Westons off, walking on the broad path, when I looked up at Mamma's sitting-room window and saw the shadow of two men on the blind, shown up by the electric light as clear and sharp as in a magic-lantern. I saw their profiles perfectly, but I did not know their faces. They wore wigs tied behind, and ruffles at their wrists, and the younger, taller man, as I saw by his shadow, wore a laced Steinkirk round his neck. They struggled together, and the old man grasped the young man by the throat, but he tore himself free, drew his sword, and ran him through the body. He fell below the level of the window out of my sight, and the younger man stood for a minute, wiped his sword, then moved away, and left the blind a blank sheet of white.'

'Good God! and I heard it all in my room below—the struggle and the fall, and deep groans!' said Mr. Stackpoole.

'And I met the young man—if it was anything human—and he passed me on the stairs!' said his daughter, seizing her father by the arm. 'Oh, Papa, Harbledon Hall is haunted; people were right about it! Do let us leave this dreadful place to-morrow!' And the concluding notes of the sad Waldteufel waltz sighed through the house as she spoke.

Mr. Stackpoole shook his head. 'I don't see how that is to be done, for your mother must not be frightened. For heaven's sake try to look as if nothing had happened. We shall be missed downstairs; I'll go, and you two must manage to bid our guests good-night decently, and not to alarm those who remain till to-morrow. We must rouse no suspicions. George, fetch Ella a glass of champagne; it will do her good.'

'Oh, don't leave me alone!' cried Mrs. Beaumont, like a frightened child.

'Then I'll send wine up for you both,' said her father, 'and mind you must follow me directly.'

Mr. Stackpoole rejoined his guests, who had not missed him, and were in the midst of the last dance with as much freshness and enjoyment as if it had been the first in the evening. At length all the guests had departed except those composing the house party, and the ladies soon retired, leaving the gentlemen to have a smoke in the billiard-room.

'You don't look very well, Beaumont,' said a young man

dressed as a Tyrolean peasant, as he lit a cigar and looked up at his friend's pale face.

'It's nothing, only waltzing makes me giddy,' and he mixed himself some brandy and soda.

One by one the guests bade good-night and left the room, till there only remained Mr. Stackpoole, his son-in-law, and Mr. Liston, a gentleman with very long legs, wearing tights to display them to advantage.

'Did your father-in-law know when he took Harbledon Hall that it was supposed to be haunted?' he said in a low voice to Mr. Beaumont. Mr. Stackpoole happened to hear the question, and replied to it himself.

'We heard some foolish gossip on the subject, for of course no place stands empty so long without legends being invented to account for the fact. But I am not the man to listen to vulgar chatter. I took the house, and have been highly delighted with it.' And Mr. Beaumont could only admire his father-in-law's admirable self-possession.

'Just so, and the electric light is the true cure for the supposed supernatural. Of course you know how suddenly Sir Roland Shawe left the place?'

'Oh, yes, we've heard all about that,' said Mr. Stackpoole, forcing a laugh.

'Do you know I doubt whether you have ever heard all about it; at least, if you have, you must be a cheerful sort of person if you can laugh at it,' said Mr. Liston.

'Why, of course, the whole thing was a foolish practical joke—something connected with a magic-lantern, if I remember rightly.'

'Magic-lantern! I never even heard the word mentioned. No; if you care to hear the truth about it, I think I can tell it you. I've lived in the county all my life, and I know the story of Harbledon Hall by heart. I only wonder you don't. I should not tell you now if I thought it would make you nervous; but since you've put in the electric light and done up the house in such cheerful modern style the whole place is changed and anyone might enjoy living here.'

'Let us hear the story,' said Mr. Stackpoole abruptly.

'I see I've roused your curiosity. The story goes that some hundred and fifty years ago there lived in this house a certain father and son who hated one another like the devil, and it is



needless to say that there was a woman in the case and a fortune at stake. The old man must have been an uncommonly bad lot, and he is said to have grossly insulted the young lady his son was about to marry, having in the first instance proposed to her himself and been refused. The two men had a deadly quarrel about it in this very house, and the upshot was that the son, mad with passion, ran his father through the heart and killed him on the spot. There, I sha'n't say anything more about it if it is too much for you,' said Mr. Liston, struck by the white faces before him.

'Go on, go on,' said Mr. Stackpoole.

'Well, one winter's night, now eight years ago, as Sir Roland Shawe was coming home late, walking across the garden, he looked up at the window of a room on the first floor where a light was burning, and he saw on the blind, in clear outline, the shadows of the old man and his son struggling together, and he saw the young man run his father through the body with his rapier.'

'I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it!' said George Beaumont, pale as death and looking ready to faint.

'You could but say that if you had seen the grim shadows yourself. It certainly is a horrid story, and though I can't say that I believe in ghosts myself, I can offer no explanations of the details I have given you. Sir Roland believed it, and he was a clear-headed, matter-of-fact sort of person. Other members of his family, too, saw and heard unaccountable things that night. One of his sons who was sitting up late for his father met the shadow of an evil-looking fellow dressed in a blue coat and wearing a powdered tie-wig, hurrying along an upper passage, carrying a naked rapier in his hand. And Lady Shawe was waked by a sound in the room next hers, which was the room where the shadows were seen on the blind—a sound of struggling and upsetting of chairs, followed by a heavy fall and deep groans. Now, if only one person had thought that he had heard or seen unaccountable things, Sir Roland would have made the best of it and stayed on at Harbledon Hall; but, by Jove! when three rational beings are each an eye or ear witness it becomes intolerable! Whether you believe in ghosts or not, you can't put up with a thing like that!'

'By Heaven, you can't, that's true!' said Mr. Stackpoole, wiping his moist brow. 'And now, Liston, that you have told me this, I'll tell you something in return. I and my family leave



Harbledon Hall to-morrow for the precise reason that drove Sir Roland Shawe out of it eight years ago.'

'Never!'

'As sure as I am alive we leave here to-morrow! I must find some reason for our sudden flight, but go we must, and I cannot have my wife alarmed.'

'I would not spend another night in the house for the world!' said Beaumont.

'But, my dear Mr. Stackpoole, I hope that nothing that I have said leads you to make this extraordinary resolution. Your imagination is excited by what you have heard; there cannot possibly be any cause why you should leave this charming place that you have just fitted up to your own taste,' said Mr. Liston soothingly.

'The story you have told us has only helped to explain what we already know. I tell you that this very night, not a couple of hours ago, in the blaze of the electric light and with the house full of company, Beaumont, my daughter, and myself have seen and heard the sights and sounds that drove Sir Roland Shawe out of Harbledon Hall; and we leave to-morrow—or rather to-day, for it is nearly six o'clock now—never to spend another night under 'this accursed roof!' and Mr. Stackpoole's voice shook as he spoke. 'I have only to request,' he added, 'that you will treat this communication as strictly confidential, for neither Beaumont nor I shall care to speak or to be spoken to about what has occurred to-night.'

Where was Mr. Stackpoole's intelligent curiosity on the subject of ghosts, and what had become of his courage? The one had been satisfied and the other daunted, and he had not the slightest desire to remain and investigate the mystery.

At late breakfast Mrs. Stackpoole was shocked by the appearance of her family. It would have been difficult to say which was most pale and haggard—her husband, her daughter, or her son-in-law. They made the poor excuse that late hours did not suit them and that dancing knocked them up, and she told them that they looked like very young children who had been to their first pantomime the night before. When the last guest was gone Mrs. Stackpoole saw that there was something seriously disturbing her husband, and was at a loss to account for his changed humour.

'My dear, we will go up to town this afternoon with George and Ella,' he said with quick decision.

'Impossible,' replied his wife, calmly. 'You, of course, can go if you like, but I really cannot.'

'Oh, do come with us, Mamma! You know how much Papa wishes it,' said her daughter.

'Yes, do come with us,' urged her son-in-law with unwonted ardour; 'it is so long since we met,' forgetting that they had spent the last month together.

Mrs. Stackpoole laughed. 'There is evidently some deep-laid plot among you three to hurry me off. Well, if you will be any the happier for my coming with you I'll do so, though it is most inconvenient to leave home in this sudden way,' said the good-tempered lady.

And they travelled up to London that day, never to return to Harbledon Hall. Mr. Stackpoole so managed that his wife did not know his real reason for giving up the most charming house they had ever lived in. He preferred that she should attribute it to his restlessness and caprice, anything rather than that her nerves should be shaken by hearing the truth.

He consulted a fashionable physician, first giving him a hint that he wished to be ordered off to the South of France immediately, and the hint being taken, he told his long-suffering wife that Dr. Blank had recommended him to go abroad at once, and in two days they were *en route* for Marseilles.

Mrs. Stackpoole was accustomed to her husband's impulsive, angular movements, so that it did not greatly disturb her; but when a week later he said that he had decided to give up Harbledon Hall, and to look for a place somewhere in the eastern counties which were as yet untrodden ground to him, she shed tears of present disappointment and prospective fatigue. When the much-enduring lady had dried her eyes and her husband had enumerated to her in detail every reason but the real one for which he was leaving their beautiful home, she said, 'My dear, if I did not know better, I should be forced to believe that you too had seen the ghost that frightened Sir Roland Shawe out of Harbledon Hall eight years ago!'

## CLICHÉS AND TAGS.

'THE chastity of his honour,' said the Prime Minister in a recent speech, alluding to a colleague's resignation. It was a good tag, and looked most effective next day in all the glory of capital letters, but it was not Lord Rosebery. He, knowing his 'Burke,' as every statesman should, no doubt was surprised to find the phrase pass unrecognised. However, that such should have been the case is really no more matter for astonishment than M. Jourdain's discovery that he had been speaking prose all his life. Our daily speech is liberally interwoven with *clichés*, tags, and phrases from long-forgotten sources, so that we quote continually and unconsciously. Not one of our greatest writers failed to leave the language a perpetual legacy of ordinary thoughts in sublimated form, or poetic ideas crystallised in simple words. We not alone speak the tongue that Shakspeare and Milton spake; we draw all our best and clearest idioms from such 'wells of English undefyled.'

In Shakspeare's case, the debt, being so enormous, is generally known and admitted; but from Beaumont and Fletcher, Dryden and Milton, down to, let us say, Matthew Arnold, there is a long list of creditors who never receive their accounts. We all know that their names are on 'Fame's eternall bead roll, worthie to be fyled,' but few of us are aware that without them even common conversation would be well-nigh bankrupt.

That the process of absorption has been very complete is indubitable, for quite lately the writer of an interesting article in one of the magazines made some statements which were evidently the outcome of this circumstance. How otherwise explain why Milton is dismissed from consideration with the summary declaration that in all 'Paradise Lost' there are not more than six or seven phrases which have become part of the language? In Book IV. there are many such *clichés* as 'Hide their diminished heads,' 'All hell broke loose,' 'Evil be thou my good,' 'Not to know me argues yourself unknown,' 'God is thy law, thou mine,' while the others supply a list too long to quote in full. Still, it is not fair to cut such old friends as 'Human face divine,' 'A bevy of fair women,' 'Grim death,' 'Grisly terror,' or 'A wilder-

ness of sweets.' Such regard is not necessary in the case of 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso,' or indeed of 'Lycidas,' as they have not had to bear the sting of neglect like 'Paradise Lost.' Our three great threnodies—Arnold's, Shelley's, and Milton's—do not yield a great crop of tags, though they are very fertile in quotations. But that, as Mr. Kipling would say, is another story.

Reading the article previously alluded to, one would conclude that Dryden must be absolutely forgotten. Marlowe fares but little better, and Beaumont and Fletcher almost worse. Yet Dryden gives us 'The noble savage,' 'Give the devil his due,' 'Through thick and thin,' 'According to her cloth she cuts her coat,' 'Every inch that is not fool is rogue,' 'Ill news flies apace,' which really runs, 'Ill news is winged with fate and flies apace,' and may be found in the 'Threnodia.' It will be understood that such instances as 'Take the goods the gods provide' and 'Men are but children of a larger growth' are purposely omitted. 'Errors, like straws, upon the surface flow' is often attributed to Pope, whose skill in cameo-cutting has been rewarded by a meed of appreciation so great that it bestows on him whatever is most incisive in the work of others.

What do we owe to Beaumont and Fletcher? Homely proverbs in plenty, from 'Beggars should be no choosers' to 'Discretion is the better part of valour,' though whether they or Shakspeare had a prior right to the latter is uncertain. From them also we inherit many prettily dressed bits of philosophy, in the 'Our acts our angels are, for good or ill' style, and many stirring tags like 'Deeds, not words,' and 'Let's meet, and either do or die.' Burns uses this phrase in his great war-song, and Campbell, who gave us 'Distance lends enchantment,' 'Angel visits,' 'Meteor flag of England,' and 'Coming events,' &c., places it in 'Gertrude of Wyoming.'

In spite of Scott's continued popularity, few people remember that from 'Old Mortality' we have 'A sea of upturned faces,' and Byron is never thanked for 'Flesh and blood can't bear it.' The 'most humorous and least exemplary of British parsons' is known to have thought 'they order things better in France' and 'God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb,' but we seldom credit him with 'I saw the iron enter into his soul.' Yet that keen image of grief, so often on our lips, may also be found in the 'Sentimental Journey.' Cowper is comparatively little read—

the immortal 'John Gilpin' always excepted—therefore we may be forgiven if the source of 'Hand and glove' or 'Her dear five hundred friends' has slipped our memories. The same may be said of Rogers' 'To know her was to love her,' Congreve's 'Married in haste and repent at leisure,' Farquhar's 'Over the hills and far away,' and Southey's 'March of intellect.' Sir Philip Sidney, who was poet, philosopher, and, best of all, hero, should share a better fate. How many can tell that it was he who first said in English, 'God helps those who help themselves'?

Goldsmith is so rarely played that we never connect him with the homely advice, 'Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no fibs.' Nevertheless, it is certainly ridiculous to find in a newspaper controversy over Butler's couplet,

For those that fly may fight again,  
Which he can never do that's slain,

a palpable ignorance that 'Goldie' supplies the more frequently quoted form :

He that fights and runs away  
May live to fight another day.

As Gray's vogue has never lessened, one need only refer to the 'Elegy' for form's sake. Every line in the last stanza of the Eton College ode has become a vernacularism, while the 'Bard' is a perfect treasure-house of *clichés*, and even the less common 'Ode on Spring' yields 'Life's little day,' 'Untaught harmony of spring,' and 'Frolic while 'tis May.'

Those heaven-born singers, Shelley and Keats, enthral our senses so utterly in their inspired bursts of melody that the fine edge of memory is unconsciously lost. Steeped in the music of the twenty-ninth stanza in the sixth canto of the 'Revolt of Islam,' we drift into the next without wondering to find an old friend in the opening line, 'To the pure all things are pure.'

Wordsworth's more controlled lyricism and reflective manner produce an effect of restfulness, and give us time to make mental notes. Yet it is not long since a popular lady novelist, who is usually very keen, attributed 'Plain living and high thinking' to Milton. 'Tintern' is full of such oft-quoted lines as 'Still sad music of humanity,' 'Nature never did betray the heart that loved her'; and elsewhere through the poems and sonnets we discover 'Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears,' 'Speak the tongue that Shakspeare spake,' 'The light that never was on sea or land,'

'The child is father to the man,' 'Like, but oh! so different,'  
'A perfect woman nobly planned,' and so on *ad infinitum*.

But to embrace all our poets and *prosateurs* cyclopædic scope would be necessary. Modern thought has naturally borrowed *clichés* from the more modern sources, so that Browning, Tennyson, Swinburne, and Matthew Arnold would alone cover an immense space. It is fitting that the prophet of 'culture' should have contributed the largest quota to the vocabulary of thinking people. One need only instance 'A free onward impulse,' 'The eternal note of sadness,' 'This iron time of doubts, disputes, distractions, fears,' 'Strange disease of modern life,' 'Never once possess our souls before we die,' and the very beautiful picture of separation, not quite in place here, but perhaps pardonable as a conclusion—

A God, a God, their severance ruled !  
And bade betwixt their shores to be  
The unplumbed, salt, estranging sea,



MATTHEW AUSTIN.<sup>1</sup>

BY W. E. NORRIS.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

## RETIREMENT.

'It just depends upon how one looks at things,' remarked Leonard. 'For my part, I can't see the use of moping, and if you'll excuse my reminding you of it, Lil, you owe something to the living as well as to the dead.'

This was some weeks after Lady Sara's funeral, and as Lilian had not stirred out of the house since that melancholy day, her husband was surely entitled to remonstrate with her. He himself, it is true, had not been required to share his wife's seclusion, and had begun to go about again as usual; still it was depressing, when he did come home, to find that mournful, tacitly accusing figure always seated in the same chair. He thought, too, that if she had been alive to a sense of her duties, she would have noticed how worried he often was, and would have tried, as a good wife should, to cheer him up a little. Lilian, on the other hand, was of opinion that he might at least have made some show of sympathising with her in her grief, even though it was so obviously out of his power to participate in it.

'I don't know what you want me to do,' she answered wearily; 'I can't give or accept invitations, and I don't suppose you would care to walk about the streets with me. I wish we could go to Stanwick!'

'Well, we shall go there when the time comes,' returned Leonard impatiently. 'As we have got to pay the rent for this house, it seems to me that we may as well occupy it until the end of our term. Besides, you wouldn't find Stanwick, with nobody staying in the house, much more cheerful than London, I'm afraid.'

There might have been a reconciliation between the couple, and perhaps it was as much Lilian's fault as Leonard's that nothing

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of the sort had taken place. She meant to do her duty; her mother's last words had produced a strong impression upon her, and if she had been less fond of the man, she would probably have found it much easier to forgive his heartlessness. But she loved him still, and she knew that he was not what she had taken him for, and fifty times a day he made her wince by speeches which had never been intended to have that effect. Therefore she answered him coldly, driving him to seek oblivion of his money troubles elsewhere; so that their estrangement became chronic. He concluded the present discussion, which lasted a few minutes longer, by saying:

'You must do as you please; but I should have thought that, for your own sake, it would be better not to shut your door against everybody. Yesterday I met Vawdrey, who was very anxious to look us up; but I was obliged to tell him that there wouldn't be the slightest use in his calling.'

'I shouldn't mind seeing Mr. Vawdrey,' said Lilian; 'if you meet him again, you can tell him so. He doesn't know me well enough to say the maddening things which old friends would be sure to say. I will see the old friends too, if you will let me wait just a little longer. After all, my shutting myself up doesn't prevent *you* from seeing as many people as you like.'

A few days later Mr. Vawdrey presented himself while Leonard was out, and his brief visit gave Lilian the first pleasant quarter of an hour that she had spent since their last meeting. He was rather shy at first, being evidently in doubt as to whether he ought to mention her loss or not; but having made up his mind to do so, he spoke with such direct simplicity and was so unaffectedly sorry for her that she found it not only possible but comforting to talk with him upon the subject.

'Yes, I know; I expect that is what everybody feels,' he said, in answer to one remark of hers; 'I felt just the same about my poor old governor. I wasn't as good a son to him as I ought to have been; more than once I went larking off with other fellows when I might have spent my leave at home. But, after all, I'm sure he forgave me, and you may depend upon it that your mother forgave you. That is, if she had really anything to forgive.'

'Oh, she had a great deal to forgive,' said Lilian sadly. 'I shouldn't feel quite such a wretch if I didn't see now how unselfish she always was with me. At the time I took it all as a right.

Indeed, I often used to think I was behaving admirably by giving way to her, when she only wished to do the best she could for me.'

Vawdrey nodded. 'Yes, that's where the shoe pinches,' he agreed. 'But I sometimes say to myself when I'm dead sick of sitting in the House that anyhow I'm carrying out the old man's wishes, though it's too late for him to know. It isn't much, but it's something; and I daresay you might do the same in a different sort of way.'

This homely method of consolation appealed to Lilian, who had not been left in ignorance of her mother's wishes, and it certainly did not occur to her that the holding of confidential intercourse with an unattached member of the other sex was a somewhat odd fashion of giving effect to them. Vawdrey was not an admirer; or if he was so, he was an admirer *pour le bon motif*. It refreshed her to look at his honest face and listen to his honest talk, and this species of refreshment was dealt out to her in the sequel with no niggardly hand. He found his way to Hans Place as often as his duty to his country, his constituents, and the Parliamentary Whips would allow him, and his visits soon became the one bright feature in Lilian's solitary existence. Leonard, too, liked the man, with whom he had many tastes in common; so that when the master of the house chanced to be dining at home on Sunday evening (which did not occur every week) it was generally arranged that Mr. Vawdrey should be present in the character of that third person who does not under all circumstances spoil company.

It cannot, however, be said that Vawdrey entertained any sentiments of amity for his host. He had by no means forgotten certain words of which he had been an unwilling hearer at Ascot, nor could he help noticing, with suppressed wrath, what he considered Jerome's ostentatious neglect of his wife. A fellow wasn't bound, of course, to mourn very profoundly for his mother-in-law; but it was scarcely decent to go about like that within a few weeks of a family bereavement; besides which, there was something almost insulting, as well as cruel, in the contrast between Jerome's present mode of life and that led by Mrs. Jerome. This was Vawdrey's view, and sometimes he had much ado to restrain himself from giving utterance to it.

On one occasion he was obliged to rise and leave the house abruptly, fearing lest, if he stayed five minutes longer, he might

say things which would have the effect of bringing his acquaintance with the Jeromes to a premature close. It was a mere trifle—in such cases it always is—that caused the smouldering animosity between the husband and wife, which ordinarily found expression rather in distant civility than in open dissension, to break for a moment into flame. Leonard had mentioned that a certain magnate, whose castle was situated in the neighbourhood of Stanwick, was in the habit of holding a cricket-week every summer in his park, with accompanying festivities in the shape of dances and theatricals.

‘I suppose,’ he added, ‘we may as well ask some people to stay with us then; it’s about the only time in the course of the year when we shall be able to hold out the faintest prospect of amusement to them. I wish you would join the gay throng, Vawdrey, if you haven’t anything better for the first week of August. We shall be giving a dance ourselves most likely.’

‘We can’t do that,’ said Lilian quietly, but decisively.

‘I think we shall have to do it,’ Leonard returned, a slight flush rising to his cheeks. ‘The other people in the county are sure to entertain us pretty freely as soon as we go home, and we must make some acknowledgment. Why do you say that we can’t?’

‘Only because I am in deep mourning. You forgot that, I suppose, when you spoke of our being entertained. Of course I shall have to decline all invitations.’

Leonard was a good-tempered man; but his temper had been subjected to severe trials of late, and it must be owned that her tone was not conciliatory.

‘May I ask,’ he inquired, ‘how long you propose to keep up this sort of thing?’

Receiving no answer, he went on, with increased irritation: ‘It is quite out of date, you know—this smothering yourself up in crape and refusing to be seen. Nobody does it nowadays; it’s ridiculous and inconvenient, and it isn’t any real proof of sorrow. I take it that we are not more heartless than the last generation, only perhaps we’re a little less hypocritical.’

‘I don’t think I am a hypocrite,’ said Lilian; ‘as for being ridiculous, I daresay I can bear that. I am sorry to put you to inconvenience, but I am afraid I can’t help it. My being in mourning hasn’t inconvenienced you very much so far, you must admit.’

'Well, I can't say that you seem to me to have studied my convenience—or anybody's except your own.'

He would have proceeded to speak a good deal more strongly, had he not, in the nick of time, become alive to the circumstance that a juvenile member of Parliament was staring at him with eyes of amazed apprehension. A vulgar conjugal row in the presence of an outsider was inadmissible, much though he wished to get his breath out; so he broke off with a laugh, saying; 'Well, never mind! But I put it to you, Vawdrey, as a reasonable being—if she can manage to talk cheerfully with a friend like yourself, oughtn't she to be able just to exchange a few observations and eat her dinner in the company of some country neighbours who may be bores, but who will have to be put up with sooner or later?'

It was at this juncture that Mr. Vawdrey had to seize his hat, stammer out something incoherent about an appointment and take to his heels. He would have liked to invite his friend Jerome to accompany him to some quiet spot, take off his coat and roll up his sleeves; but that fashion of intimating to a fellow-creature that he does not possess your esteem cannot be resorted to in highly-civilised communities, nor could society hold together for a single day if a man were permitted to say just what he thought.

What Mr. Vawdrey thought was that Mrs. Jerome's husband was a downright brute; so it was as well that he had self-control enough to say nothing. It would have been better also if he had abstained from saying anything a few days after, when he found Lilian alone; but since she chose to ask his opinion as to whether it was her duty to entertain and be entertained in those northern latitudes whither she was shortly to be transported, he was fain to reply, with some warmth:

'I don't know so much about your duty, but I haven't a doubt about Jerome's. A man's first duty is to his wife, and he has no business to ask you to do what would make you miserable.'

'I suppose he doesn't believe that it would make me miserable,' said Lilian.

'Then he ought to believe it. The truth is that what he had the imp—that what he said the other day about you ought to have been said about himself: he studies nobody's convenience except his own.'

Whatever the reciprocal duties of a husband and wife may be,

it is certain that neither should discuss the other's character with a third person. Lilian, being sensible of this, administered the gentle rebuke which the occasion called for and changed the subject. But she shared Vawdrey's opinion, all the same.

'What has become of your friend Mr. Frere?' she asked, merely by way of starting the conversation again, and because he looked too crestfallen to undertake that task for himself. 'Is he still in England, or has he joined his wife at some foreign watering-place?'

'Oh, he's in England,' answered Vawdrey, laughing in an embarrassed and deprecating way. 'In point of fact, he's doing secretary for me just now.'

'Dear me! Is your correspondence so large that you require a secretary?'

'Well, there really are a lot of letters; you've no idea what a lot of letters a man gets when he's in Parliament. Of course, I don't mean to say that Frere hasn't rather an easy berth of it; but he said he didn't mind taking it as a stop-gap, and it may lead to something better.'

'I should think he would be in no hurry to make a change. Probably you give him a large salary.'

'No, indeed; only just enough to keep him——'

'Honest?'

'Ah! you're too hard upon him! Frere is a much better chap than you think, and I dare say he's much better than I should be if I had been through what he has. His wife offered to allow him three hundred a year, upon the condition that he lived away from her; but he wouldn't take it. He said he preferred to shift for himself.'

'Meaning that he preferred to let you shift for him.'

'Of course, you can put it in that way, if you choose,' answered Vawdrey, looking distressed, for he had mentally idealised Lilian, and he did not like to hear her say spiteful things; 'but it was before I offered him the secretaryship that he refused to touch her money. I suppose I mightn't bring him here some day, might I?'

'I can't honestly say that I should enjoy seeing him,' answered Lilian; 'but it doesn't much matter, because he won't want to come. I doubt whether he likes me any better than I like him.'

It appeared, however, that Spencer was, for some reason or



other, desirous of renewing acquaintance with the lady who had given him so little encouragement. Accordingly, he paid his respects one afternoon, and if Lilian, upon closer scrutiny, was unable to discern any good points about the man, she had to acknowledge that his manners were no longer objectionable. He sat, with his hat between his knees, watching and listening, but only speaking when he was spoken to, and although something was said about Wilverton, he refrained from mentioning Matthew Austin's name. Only, as he walked away, he remarked laconically to his friend and patron:

'There will be a row in that house soon, you'll see. You know your own business best; but I wouldn't be mixed up in it if I were you.'

'I certainly shall not be mixed up in it in the way that you mean,' answered Vawdrey rather sharply. Then he asked, with a touch of anxiety: 'Why do you say that there will be a row? Are people talking about it?'

'Oh, it's notorious,' answered Spencer, a good deal of whose leisure time was spent in listening to gossip which had passed through the lips of many informants before it reached him, 'that our good friends Mr. and Mrs. Jerome are two. Let us hope that they will arrange matters without troubling the President of the Divorce Court.'

The circumstance to which he alluded really was, in a restricted sense, notorious. 'People'—that is to say, the people who knew the Jeromes—had been mildly scandalised earlier in the season, and now saw their previous suspicions confirmed by Leonard's frequent appearances amongst them without his wife. It was all very well, they shrewdly remarked, to say that her retirement was due to her mother's recent death, but that did not explain her refusal to admit visitors. It was, therefore, necessary to suggest or invent explanations, some of which even found their way to a point as far distant from the gay world as Wilverton.

It was Mr. Litton who first communicated current reports to Matthew. 'Leonard's marriage seems to be turning out very much as might have been anticipated,' was the old man's comment upon what he had heard. 'They tell me that he is to blame, and I can well believe it; but I shall be very much surprised if it does not turn out that she has been to blame also. What else could he expect of a woman who had already shown herself to be as shameless as she was fickle? Excuse my employing the

adjectives that belong to her ; I would not do so if I did not feel sure that you had quite got over your former weakness in that quarter.'

'Nevertheless, I would rather that you did not apply those adjectives to Mrs. Jerome,' Matthew returned ; 'to the best of my belief, they don't belong to her. If there is really anything like a serious quarrel—but that will prove to have been an exaggeration, I hope—the cause probably is that he cannot feel as she does about poor Lady Sara's death. What you tell me as to his being seen everywhere without her sounds as if that might be it.'

'It sounds to me a good deal more as if they were tired of one another already,' Mr. Litton remarked. 'As for Lady Sara, the chances are that he doesn't treat her memory with any great respect ; for she left next to nothing, I understand—which must have been a disappointment to him. But, whatever may be the matter, it is evident that he and his wife are repenting at their leisure of what they did in haste. A time may even come when he will repent of having made me look foolish by losing an election which a very little exertion would have enabled him to win. Meanwhile, possession is nine points of the law, and it will be a hard matter to get the seat back now that Baxendale has secured it.'

Mr. Litton was not a very ardent politician ; but he had been mortified by the discomfiture of the party to which he belonged, and he was so determined to fix all responsibility for that discomfiture upon his nephew that Matthew had ceased to take up the cudgels on Leonard's behalf. What the old man wanted now was contrition and submission ; it was not unlikely that he would get what he wanted ere long, Matthew thought, though it seemed extremely unlikely that Sir William Baxendale would be unseated at the next general election.

The successful candidate had departed for Park Lane, where he resided when in London, without having taken any steps towards altering his widowed condition. That much Matthew had ascertained ; but Mrs. Frere, who had been his informant, did not seem to be at all discouraged.

'He will be coming home again in the summer,' she said cheerfully, 'and then we shall see. Really, when one comes to think of it, it's almost impossible that Anne should refuse him. In some cases, of course, one can't feel sure ; but that is when

there has been somebody else. Now, there never was anybody else in her case, because we have never been able to give her the chance, poor dear !'

Matthew was too honest to say that he hoped Mrs. Frere's wishes might be fulfilled, although he could not but acknowledge that they were very natural and excusable wishes for a mother to entertain. There are, however, many events, desirable in the abstract, at the accomplishment of which one does not care to assist in the character of a spectator, and as the slack season had now set in, Matthew decided somewhat suddenly to go off to Switzerland for a well-earned holiday. Somehow or other, he was growing a little tired of Wilverton, and as he stepped into the train, he told himself that it would do him good to turn his back upon the place for a season.

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#### CHAPTER XXXIV.

##### LILIAN AS A HOSTESS.

'CHEERFUL, isn't it ?' said Leonard. 'Jolly sort of place to live in all the year round.'

He was standing, after breakfast, by one of the high, narrow windows of the Stanwick Hall dining-room, and it must be confessed that the rain-enshrouded landscape before him looked sufficiently dreary to justify the lugubrious air with which he regarded it.

'But it isn't always like this, I suppose,' answered Lilian, rising from the table and drawing a little nearer to him.

'Oh, not always ; sometimes there is snow and more often there are black north-easters. But the sky is always grey, and the trees always present the appearance of having had their back hair combed over their eyes, and the general aspect of things is always one of forlorn solitude. To be sure, you have developed a taste for solitude.'

If she had, he did not mean her to gratify it more than he could help. They had arrived from London on the previous day, having remained there until the fag-end of the season, and the first batch of guests who had been prevailed upon to visit them in their remote home was expected for the morrow.

'What are we going to do with them ?—that's the question,'

said Leonard despondently. 'There will be the cricket, of course, if they care to look on at it—which they probably won't—and there will be the dance and the theatricals at the Castle; but upon my word, it's almost brutal to ask people to stay with you when you aren't allowed even to invite a few friends to meet them at dinner!'

Lilian conceded the dinner—'half a dozen dinners, if you like'—but, as she drew the line at a ball, her concession earned her scanty gratitude. She was strongly of opinion that she would have been within her right had she declined to receive anybody, while Leonard was just as strongly of opinion that her chief wish was to thwart him; so that they spent a sufficiently unhappy day and were not sorry to be delivered from one another's chilling politeness by the advent of their guests.

These, as Leonard himself confessed, were 'a mixed lot.' It is not everybody who is ready to jump at an invitation to a country house in the extreme north-east corner of England at a time of year when plenty of pleasanter quarters are obtainable, and the Papillons had to be included in the list, with a deprecatory shrug on the part of their host. Not that Lilian objected to the Papillons or that there was any occasion to offer apologies for them. The days had gone by when the languishing glances, or even the risky remarks, of a lady who belonged to the extinct class of professional beauties had had power to make Mrs. Jerome's blood boil. It was almost amusing, it certainly was not in the least distressing, to watch her little coquetries and catch fragments of the reproaches which she was pleased to address to one who had begun by admiring and had subsequently neglected her. Mrs. Papillon or another—what did it signify, since Leonard evidently found it essential to his comfort that there should be somebody? Indeed, the woman was not much, if at all, more uncongenial than her companions of both sexes, whose appetites had to be satisfied and whose requirements had to be studied as far as an insufficient staff of servants would allow.

Lilian was not brilliantly successful as a hostess; no doubt it would have been impossible for her to be so without a far larger supply of horses and ready money than could be accorded to her, and her husband might have remembered that. However, he only saw that she did not like his friends, that she played her part in a laborious, perfunctory way, that she offered no suggestions for their entertainment, and that the culinary arrangements

were defective. Having no head for details, he never took into account the small daily worries by which she was beset, nor did he give her credit for working hard—as she actually was doing—to battle with them. He thought himself a real good fellow because he refrained from uttering the remonstrances which were upon the tip of his tongue.

Not many of us, it is to be feared, would have the audacity to describe ourselves as real good fellows if we only knew what the other real good fellows are in the habit of saying about us, and Mr. Vawdrey, for one, was by no means disposed to confer that title upon a host who welcomed him heartily. Vawdrey arrived one evening, in response to the invitation which he had received, and drove up from the station in company with Lady Bannock, who had contrived to spare a few days to her brother on her way north. Perhaps her ladyship's affectionate eulogies of 'poor dear Leonard' did not please her fellow-traveller: at any rate, he could not resist saying that, however dear Jerome might be, Mrs. Jerome seemed to him to be the more deserving of compassion of the two. Consequently, Lady Bannock received a disagreeable impression of Mr. Vawdrey, which was confirmed by her subsequent observation of him.

Yet he did not behave at all badly. If Lilian was glad to see him, if her voice softened and her face brightened up when he spoke to her, if he preferred staying at home with her to looking on at third-class cricket with the rest of the house-party, and if he was sometimes a little short in his replies to Leonard, these were surely very slight foundations upon which to ground a whole superstructure of scandalous suspicion. But Lady Bannock had never liked either her brother's marriage or his wife; so that she was scarcely an unprejudiced spectator of incidents which seemed to cause no disquietude to her brother himself. She believed Lilian to be a confirmed flirt, she had her doubts as to the morality of any member of the luckless Kingsbridge family, and she saw—as indeed nobody could well help seeing—that the Jeromes had ceased to be a devoted couple.

'Bother that doctor-man!' this really kind-hearted lady was provoked into muttering under her breath; 'why on earth couldn't he insist upon his rights when he had them? I was sorry for him at the time, I remember, but I am a great deal more sorry for Leonard now.'

She was determined to be sorry for Leonard, who, nevertheless,

seemed to be pretty well satisfied with his present lot. The weather became fine; he found that, after all, there was something to do every day; Mrs. Papillon amused him, and it was a relief to him to hear Lilian laugh again every now and then. Since Vawdrey alone appeared to have the gift of making her laugh, there was cause for thankfulness in the fact that Vawdrey seemed inclined to prolong his visit. He was also quite pleased with his wife and grateful to her for consenting to join a picnic expedition to Radworth, a little fishing-village on the coast, where there were sands and cliffs and a view over the grey expanse of the North Sea which people who admired nature under her more sombre aspects had been heard to praise. Radworth was not, to tell the truth, a particularly attractive spot; still, with lobster mayonnaise, champagne, and Mrs. Papillon in the foreground and a clear sky overhead, it answered his purpose fairly well.

Lady Bannock opined that it was answering Lilian's purpose into the bargain when she saw her hostess and Mr. Vawdrey stroll off together towards the dilapidated old church on the heights above the harbour, after partaking of a very moderate amount of refreshment. But, as a matter of fact, Lilian's thoughts were not for the moment occupied with her companion, nor was she listening to his remarks.

'Do you want to see that church?' she asked suddenly, addressing him for the first time, as soon as they had reached the summit of the acclivity. 'There are some ancient brasses in it, I believe; but one brass is exactly the same as another to me—and I should think it was to you too.'

'I could die contentedly without ever setting eyes upon another brass, ancient or modern; I want to do just what you want to do, that's all,' the young man replied, with his customary willingness to oblige.

'Oh, I only wanted to get away,' said Lilian, as she seated herself upon the short, crisp turf and drew her knees up to her chin. 'It seems to me,' she added presently, 'as if the rest of my life would probably be spent in wanting to get away.'

'It's an abominable shame that you can't!' burst out Vawdrey, replying rather to the despairing look upon her face than to her somewhat imprudent words.

There had been many previous talks between them during which she had sometimes spoken quite as unadvisedly and had been answered after a fashion for which Vawdrey had taken him-



self to task in his cooler moments. He did not wish her to leave her husband; he knew very well that such a step as that must needs prove more disastrous for her than living on in the most uncongenial of homes; yet he could not endure to see her suffering, and it occasionally struck him—as it is apt to strike a good many people—that some means ought to be devised of annulling unhappy marriages by mutual consent. However, she did not seem to have understood him.

‘I don’t know that there is any shame about it,’ she answered indifferently; ‘it’s unlucky, if you like. Most people could get away, because most people have heaps of relations whom they could go and stay with; but I am badly provided for in that respect. Besides, it’s my duty to remain at home and entertain visitors, I suppose.’

‘I wonder whether you could be persuaded to come and stay with my people for a bit!’ exclaimed the young fellow eagerly. ‘We wouldn’t have anybody else in the house, and you could do just what you liked, you know, and—and it’s rather a pretty place. My mother and the girls would be awfully glad to see you.’

‘I am not so sure of that,’ returned Lilian, shaking her head and laughing a little. ‘No; thank you very much for thinking of it, but I am afraid I couldn’t take advantage of your invitation. Besides, you forget my visitors. I wish,’ she concluded, with a reflective sigh, ‘that I didn’t dislike them so much!’

‘As if you could help disliking them!—*some* of them, anyhow.’

Lilian turned her head to glance inquiringly at him; for the vehemence and bitterness of his intonation surprised her. ‘Ought I to have a special detestation for any individual among them?’ she asked. ‘You mean Mrs. Papillon, perhaps; but really I don’t much mind Mrs. Papillon now, though I used to mind her once upon a time. She isn’t a very alarming rival.’

‘That’s hardly the question, is it? In one sense such a woman couldn’t possibly be your rival; it would be ridiculous to mention you in the same breath! But in another sense any scullery-maid might be.’

Never before had Vawdrey ventured to use such unequivocal language, although the fact of Lilian’s domestic unhappiness had not been concealed from him. The chilling rejoinder which he now received warned him that he had gone too far.

‘I haven’t reached the point of selecting ugly scullery-maids

yet,' she said. 'Some women do, I believe; but it is not very easy to understand why they should think it worth while. Suppose we change the subject. How are you getting on with your constituents? Are you preparing to address them at great length and at short intervals during the recess?'

Vawdrey sighed and tried not to look as crestfallen as he felt. 'Oh, yes,' he answered; 'my mother is a Primrose League Dame, and we are to have a big *al fresco* entertainment in the park soon, at which I shall have to stand on a platform and spout with the other long-winded nonentities of the district. Sack-races and Ethiopian minstrels and plenty of buns and tea may make some amends, one hopes. The disheartening part of the whole business is that not one in a thousand of the voters cares a brass farthing about his country, and we can't appeal to their cupidity, because we have no absurd impossibilities to offer them, as the Radicals have. I've worked hard to get up the subject of agriculture, and I think I know something about it now; but I've nothing to say, except the truth—and they don't like that. Frere tells me I might at least hold my tongue; only the mischief of it is that I ain't allowed to hold my tongue.'

'I dare say you will learn, though Mr. Frere, as far as my experience of him goes, is not much in the habit of practising what he preaches,' remarked Lilian. 'You still cling to your secretary, then?'

'Yes, and I find him more and more useful. I sometimes wish we could change places, for he has ten times my brains and he seems to be interested in politics, which I hate. I suppose it's a cowardly view to take, but it seems to me that, since we Tories are beaten, we might as well say so and throw up the sponge at once, instead of attempting to outbid the other side. As we're in the right, why shouldn't we stand aside until the nation finds out by experience that it has been duped and calls us back?'

But this gallant effort to comply with Lilian's behests and divert the conversation into a safer channel met with no success. When two people are thinking of one and the same thing it is next door to impossible for them to avoid mentioning it for any length of time, and Lilian, whose indifference to her country's weal was, it is to be feared, almost as complete and as reprehensible as that of the agricultural labourer, ended by reverting to the topic which she herself had banished from the field of discussion.

'One talks of wanting to get away,' she remarked, *à propos* of

nothing at all and without any pretence of having been interested in her companion's dissertation upon the advance of democracy, 'but it isn't so much from other people that one wants to get away as from one's self. How is that to be done?'

It is to be done in many different ways; but possibly Vawdrey was acquainted with none of these; for, instead of answering her question, he said decisively, 'You wouldn't want to get away from yourself unless there was somebody from whom you wanted to escape. And I'm sure I don't wonder that you should!'

Lilian was staring out over the brink of the cliff at the sands beneath, where Leonard and Mrs. Papillon could be seen, engaged in the exciting pastime of throwing stones at a bottle. 'I suppose you mean my husband,' she said composedly.

'I beg your pardon; I oughtn't to have said it, of course; but——'

'Oh, I don't mind; you know us well enough now to know what the state of the case is, and I am not afraid of your repeating anything that I may say to you. All the same, I was not thinking of Leonard; he has as much reason to complain of me as I have of him. Only I can't help being dull and stupid and a wet blanket. I wonder whether I shall always go on like this or whether I shall change all of a sudden, as I have often done before. If I do, the change isn't likely to be for the better. My mother always used to be in terror lest I should end badly.'

The above sentences were uttered with a pause between each and were evidently fragments of an unspoken soliloquy. Lilian was gazing at the misty horizon line, where the pale blue sky met the grey sea; she seemed to have forgotten her neighbour and did not even turn her head when he exclaimed impetuously:

'I wish you wouldn't talk like that! It sounds as if you didn't care what became of you.'

'Why should I?' she returned; 'nobody else does. My mother cared; but she is dead now, and I don't believe that dead people can see what is going on in this world. It would be too miserable for them if they could.'

'Well, I can answer for it that there is one living person, anyhow, who cares a great deal for you,' Vawdrey declared.

A tremor in his voice caused her to withdraw her eyes abruptly from the distant prospect and fix them upon the countenance of the speaker. It is a fact that until that moment she had never suspected the existence of what was plainly legible there, and the

discovery was not a welcome one to her. On the other hand, she was not greatly shocked or perturbed by it, having become inured to similar discoveries. Disappointment and regret at the loss of a friend were the sole sentiments of which she was conscious as she rose to her feet, saying quietly:

‘Isn’t it nearly time for you to be going back home?’

‘Home?—to Stanwick; do you mean?’ he asked.

‘Well, I suppose we shall all be going back to Stanwick presently,’ she replied, with a faint smile; ‘but I meant that you had better return soon to your mother and your Primrose League meetings and all the rest of it. Don’t you think so yourself?’

A quick flush overspread his cheeks and faded away, leaving him rather pale. Perhaps it was not Lilian alone who had made a discovery during the past few minutes. However, he answered without hesitation and in a matter-of-fact tone of voice: ‘Yes, I expect the Primrose Leaguers will be clamouring for me; I’ll be off by the first train to-morrow morning.’

There was no occasion to say more: they understood one another and they knew that their pleasant intimacy must cease. For the moment, they were not sorry to be intruded upon by Lady Bannock, who had breasted the hill in search of them and who drew their attention somewhat acrimoniously to the church clock. No further opportunity for private converse fell to their lot that day; only on the following morning Vawdrey found that Lilian had come downstairs to superintend his early breakfast, and when she bade him farewell, she asked him to write to her sometimes.

‘Friendships can’t be kept up by post,’ she remarked; ‘still I don’t want you to forget me immediately, and I should like to hear how you get on. You might let me know of any important occurrence in your life—such as your marriage, for instance, which seems to be inevitable.’

‘I shall never marry,’ he answered decisively; but he could not trust himself to give reasons for that positive statement, and he was driven away from Stanwick to the accompaniment of the incredulous laughter which it merited.

As for Lady Bannock, she breathed more freely as soon as she heard of Mr. Vawdrey’s departure.

‘If I were you, I wouldn’t have that young man in the house again,’ she had the indiscretion to say to her brother. ‘It may be all right, but with some people one never can feel quite certain, and Lilian is so—shall we say odd?’

'We will call her odd, if you like,' answered Leonard, with an impatient laugh; 'she can't be called even, anyhow. I'm sure I don't know from one day to another how she will take things. For my own part, I'm only too glad to have anybody in the house whom she doesn't hate; but it looks to me as if we should soon have no house to put anybody in. If Uncle Richard persists in living and in buttoning up his pockets, I shall be broke before long.'

Several speeches of this kind had already been made to Lady Bannock, whose husband, although a rich man, was extremely unlikely to see the propriety of supporting her relations, so she hastened to effect her escape.

'There ought to be a son and heir,' she said querulously, as she left the room; 'that would set everything right. Why isn't there a son and heir?'

Indeed, it seemed to this good lady that Mrs. Leonard Jerome had shown herself deficient in all the qualities which a wife ought to possess.

#### CHAPTER XXXV.

##### LEONARD PAYS HIS FRIEND A COMPLIMENT.

THE woods round about Wilverton had already discarded the monotonous dark green of late summer for the yellow and brown and russet tints of autumn when Matthew Austin returned from a holiday which had lasted somewhat longer than he had originally intended it to do. Among the less frequented valleys of the Alps he had found what he had started in search of—he had become bitten with a taste for mountaineering on an unambitious scale; his *locum tenens* had assured him that there was no occasion to hurry back, and by the time that he reached home once more he flattered himself that he was both physically and mentally a healthier man than when he had set forth on his travels.

He was, to be sure, a singularly lonely man; but then he had never in reality been anything else, and there are worse evils than solitude. At the same time, when one has no immediate belongings to care for or worry about, one naturally feels a keener interest in the destinies of one's acquaintances; so that Matthew was not a little anxious to hear the latest intelligence from Hayes Park. He betook himself thither two days after his arrival, and

was received by Mrs. Frere, who at once announced that she had no news of importance to give him. Sir William Baxendale, it appeared, had gone off to Homburg at the end of the Session, instead of spending the summer at home, and had since been disporting himself at various pleasure-resorts upon the Continent.

‘However, he is expected shortly,’ Mrs. Frere said, ‘and Emma corresponds regularly with Anne, which I think is a hopeful sign. Of course, one can’t expect a man of his age to be impetuous; though I am sure he wouldn’t keep me in this uncomfortable state of suspense if he only knew how much I want to get him settled and done for. Anne? Oh, she just jogs along as usual—anxious and troubled about many things, I am afraid, but not much about poor dear Sir William, as far as I can judge. Anxieties and troubles are unavoidable; but one should try to forget them when one can. I only wish I could persuade George to forget his!’

Mrs. Frere paused for a moment, sighed, and then resumed: ‘I know you have heard something about our eldest son. I never like to mention him, because it is such a painful subject, but sometimes I can’t help wondering whether it might not be possible to give him one more chance. He has quarrelled with that vulgar wife of his, we hear, and now he is private secretary to a Mr. Vawdrey, who is a man of property and a member of Parliament. I should have thought that sounded like a desire to become respectable; but George won’t see that there is any merit in his having separated himself from the woman—which of course there isn’t, in one sense—only, as we never could have received her—However,’ concluded Mrs. Frere, in her customary philosophical way, ‘things often turn out better than one ventures to expect.’

Matthew said something commonplace. He was rather shy of taking about Spencer, having still a certain sore feeling as to the manner in which his interference with the affairs of the family scapegrace had been received, and he was glad when Mrs. Frere at once rambled off into doubts whether Harry ought not to be recalled from India, in order to take his place as heir-presumptive.

‘Not that there will be much of an inheritance for him to succeed to, poor boy! The only thing is that, if we had him upon the spot, one might possibly find an heiress for him. I suppose you don’t happen to know of any young woman who is a lady and not bad-looking and has a few thousands a year of her



own? Of course you don't, though; there are no such young women nowadays, except Americans. After all, an American might do, if she didn't insist upon a title. They are most of them pretty, you know, and some are clever, and I hear that their relations give very little trouble. Then the next thing will be to establish Maggie, who is growing up faster even than the weeds in my poor garden. What is to become of Dick I can't think. George says we shall all be upon the parish before we die; but I tell him that a good dose of colchicum would drive all those dismal notions out of his head. By the way, what do you think of colchicum? They say it is an old-fashioned remedy which is coming into use again, and that numbers of gouty people have been relieved by it.'

Matthew did not lend a very attentive ear to these and other disconnected remarks. He lingered on, in the hope that Anne might come in; but he had to take his leave at last, and it was with a slight sense of disappointment that he rose to say good-bye. Upon the doorstep, however, it was his good fortune to meet the predestined Lady Baxendale, who mentioned that she had just returned from a walk and was kind enough to add that she was glad to see him back again. She was looking remarkably handsome, he thought, her walk having given her a colour; she was also very cheerful and amiable, insisting upon a circumstantial account of his wanderings, to which she listened with much apparent interest. Yet, somehow or other, she was no longer the Anne Frere whom he had met for the first time nearly two years before, and he was not at all sure that he did not prefer her old uncertain moods to her present determined politeness.

'I suppose you know about Spencer,' she said at length, conquering a visible reluctance to introduce that topic.

'I only know what your mother told me just now—that he has left his wife and that he is acting as private secretary to somebody,' Matthew answered.

'To Mr. Vawdrey. I thought perhaps you might have heard of him from the Jeromes. Mr. Vawdrey is a great friend of Mrs. Jerome's, I believe,' said Anne, and it struck Matthew that there was something rather odd about the voice in which this statement was made. He glanced interrogatively at the speaker; but as she volunteered nothing further, he merely remarked:

'I don't correspond with the Jeromes. All is well with them, I hope?'

'Oh, I don't correspond with them either,' answered Anne.

'Yes, I believe they are quite well. Spencer sometimes mentions them in his letters.'

'You do correspond with him, then?'

'He has written several times lately. No; not to ask for money; he says the salary that Mr. Vawdrey gives him is quite as much as he wants, and he is taking nothing from his wife. I think he is really fond of me, and he always speaks most warmly and gratefully of you.'

'He doesn't owe me anything,' said Matthew.

'He thinks that he owes you a great deal—which, of course, is the truth.'

There was a short interval of silence; after which Anne exclaimed, as if involuntarily, 'I wish I could believe him!'

'But can't you?'

'Not quite. I am afraid he only writes as he does, and talks about having turned over a new leaf, because he thinks I shall show his letters to my father or my mother. For the time being, he seems to be going on steadily; but I daren't hope that it will last. Don't you think it is great nonsense to say that there can be no such thing as love without respect?'

'Well, yes; I think it is rather nonsense,' answered Matthew reflectively. 'Judging by my own sensations and experience, I should say that it was quite possible to love a person for whom it was not possible to feel any great respect.'

Anne made a quick gesture of irritation. 'I don't think a *man* ought to feel like that,' she returned; 'it seems to me a little beneath him. A woman's case is altogether different.'

Then, perceiving that Matthew was somewhat surprised at being attacked for having agreed with her, she added impatiently:

'Oh, well, it can't be helped. Men and women, we are what we are, and there is no more to be said about it.'

He went away with the impression that she had been going to say something more, but that he had unintentionally checked or chilled her. Not for the first time since he had endeavoured to play the part of a friend to Anne Frere was this annoying conviction brought home to him, and it made him more impatient with her than he was wont to be with the failings of his fellow-mortals. For the rest, if she had been going to consult him as to the feasibility of Spencer's reinstatement, he could not have helped her. He knew that if he himself had been afflicted with a son like Spencer, he would have forgiven the man until seventy

times seven ; but he was not at all prepared to assert that such a course would be expedient, and, in any event, the matter was one for Mr. Frere's decision.

After this he saw very little more of Anne. The daily routine of his work soon claimed him again ; nobody being ill at Hayes Park, he had not the time to turn his horse's head in that direction, and it was only through Mrs. Jennings that he learned every now and then, as the weeks passed on, how Sir William Baxendale had returned, how large shooting-parties were being held at the Priory, and how assiduously Anne was helping Miss Baxendale to entertain her brother's guests.

'Quite as if she were one of the family already !' the charitable creature said. 'I am sure nobody will rejoice more sincerely than I shall if the Freres succeed ; but it does seem rather imprudent to fling their daughter at the poor man's head as they are doing. Enough to frighten him out of the county again—which would be a very great pity.'

Mrs. Jennings, who knew everything, also knew, and stated that she had heard with the deepest regret, what a terrible mistake young Jerome's hasty marriage was turning out. For her own part, she made a point of never judging anybody until the worst had been proved beyond a doubt, but she feared it was only too true that Mrs. Jerome had been encouraging admirers—notably, a young man named Vawdrey, who had recently succeeded to large estates, and who had been staying at Stanwick Hall.

'You may imagine what a sad trouble this is to poor old Mr. Litton in his precarious state of health. Dr. Jennings doubts whether he would survive the disgrace of an open scandal.'

One of the disadvantages of being an open scandal-monger is that, after having earned that reputation, you are not very likely to be believed even when you tell the truth, and Matthew, who saw the old recluse at the Grange pretty constantly, was sure that, if there had been any ground for Mrs. Jennings's assertions, he would have heard of it. As a matter of fact, Mr. Litton seldom alluded to his nephew, except to make some sardonic remark as to the probability of his being requested ere long to pay the latter's bills, while he disliked Lilian so much that, had he known anything against her, he assuredly would not have failed to mention it. Matthew, therefore, saw no reason for believing that time had avenged him upon the supplanter who had never ceased to be his friend, and to whom he wished nothing but good.

The first frosts of winter were hardening the ground and bringing down the withered leaves in showers when he was abruptly reminded that there are two ways of wishing your friends well, and that the practical method is apt to be a very inconvenient one. Returning home late and weary one evening, he was surprised to hear that Mr. Jerome had been for two hours awaiting him in his study, and the words of welcome with which he hurried into the room died away upon his lips at the sight of his visitor's haggard countenance.

'My dear fellow, what is the matter?' he exclaimed.

'I'm glad I look as if something was the matter,' answered Leonard gloomily, while he took the other's outstretched hand; 'it saves introductory remarks—and goodness knows I *ought* to look pretty bad! Do you remember my telling you, the last time we met, that if ever I got into a hole, I should come straight to you? Well, here I am; and the long and the short of it is that, unless you can help me out of this hole—which seems almost impossible—I shall have the bailiffs upon me before Christmas.'

'Oh, it's only money, then?' said Matthew, with a sigh of relief.

'Only money!—why, what would the man have? Oh, I see what you are thinking about. Well, yes; since I am making a clean breast of it, I may as well confess at once that Lilian and I are not candidates for the Dunmow fitch. We haven't got on quite as well as we might have done; I think her rather unreasonable, and I dare say she thinks me rather unfeeling—you may have heard something about it perhaps. But things will go more smoothly after a bit, if only I can manage to keep my head above water. If I can't, Heaven only knows what will happen!'

He was a little ashamed of himself, but a good deal more sorry for himself. He related how he had been drawn into unforeseen expenditure, not stating in so many words, but allowing it to be inferred, that his wife had cost him a good deal more money than an economical manager would have done; he owned that he had been silly enough to back horses, and that he had been even more ill-advised in endeavouring to recover his losses through speculations on the Stock Exchange; finally, he asked Matthew, as a reasonable, sensible man, what the dickens he was to do.

'The Jews are no good; I've raised all I can on mortgages, and it's impossible to give them the security they ask for. As for applying to Uncle Richard, that would be simply suicidal. I know

as well as possible what he would do: he would pay up, cut me out of his will and wish me good morning. There's Bannock, who isn't a bad fellow; but he would see me jolly well hanged before he would lend me as much as I must have if I'm to tide over another year. So, you see, it just comes to this: if you're enough of a Croesus to advance me the amount, you'll be the salvation of me, and you won't really run any risk to speak of. I shall be able to pay you back, with interest, as soon as the old man dies, and he is failing fast. You must have noticed that yourself.'

'What is the amount?' asked Matthew.

'I know you think me rather a brute for talking in this way; but I should be an utter humbug if I pretended to have any affection for my uncle. He is only glad to see me now because he is rubbing his hands with glee at the thought that I have come to ask for money. If you can be fond of a man who exults over you when you are in trouble, I can't. I shall be rich when he dies; I want very badly to be rich, and I no more want his society than he wants mine. You must remember that he has never been a bit like a father to me, and that he has never shown me the slightest kindness or sympathy in my life.'

'I can understand your having no great love for Mr. Litton,' said Matthew. 'My own belief is that he is much fonder of you than you suppose or than he cares to show; but never mind that now. The question is whether I can help you. How much do you require?'

Leonard heaved a profound sigh. 'My dear old man,' he answered, 'if you can't manage it without putting yourself to great inconvenience, you mustn't mind saying so. It does sound a lot; but I'm afraid it must be that or nothing. The only thing is that of course you may get it back again within a few months, and you're quite certain of getting it back soon.'

'Unless your uncle disinherits you,' observed Matthew, smiling. 'But would you mind telling me how much it is?'

Leonard paused for a moment before replying to this third query. Then, with the air of one who gulps down a dose of castor-oil, he brought out his answer. 'It's—it's ten thousand pounds.'

Matthew's jaw dropped. 'Ten thousand! I didn't think you would want so much as that.'

'I don't see how I can do with less,' answered Leonard sorrowfully; 'I've had such ghastly bad luck! Even if I said eight thousand, it wouldn't make much difference, I suppose.'

‘Not very much. Well, I must think it over, and I will let you know to-morrow whether it is in my power or not to raise so large a sum. You wouldn’t allow me to lay the whole case before your uncle and hear what he says about it, would you?’

‘Not for the world!—there can’t be a shadow of a doubt that he would jump at that excuse for altering his will. As it is, he couldn’t, with any sort of decency, disinherit me. I needn’t tell you that we are going to cut down all unnecessary expenses. I shall let Stanwick again as soon as I can find a tenant, and we are looking out for a cheap little house in London. How my wife will stand poverty I’m sure I don’t know; but we must hope that the ordeal won’t last long. If you could by any possibility——’

‘I will if I can,’ interrupted Matthew a little curtly. ‘More than that I cannot say just now. And indeed,’ he added, glancing at his watch and smiling again, ‘I haven’t time to say more. Go away, and let me see you to-morrow about the same hour. No; I haven’t earned any thanks yet, and I don’t want any apologies. You pay me a compliment by coming to me in your trouble.’

But Leonard, while he was being gently pushed towards the door, could not help ejaculating, ‘What a good fellow you are, Austin! I don’t believe there ever has been such another good fellow since the world began!’

Evidently, he already felt sure of his ten thousand pounds.

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### A CHANGE OF QUARTERS.

TEN thousand pounds is a large sum of money either to lend or to give away, and all sensible men who have reached a certain age have learnt that what they cannot afford to give away they cannot afford to lend. Matthew Austin, who perhaps scarcely deserved to be called a sensible man, had at all events sense enough to know that much; so he looked into his affairs with a view to ascertaining whether he could possibly come to his friend’s rescue. He found that the requisite amount could be realised, a corresponding curtailment of his income being the necessary consequence; he found also that he had hitherto, in his careless way,



been living very nearly up to the edge of his income, and that he must live very differently henceforth, or else decline to assist a man who, when all was said, had absolutely no claim upon him. To count upon repayment within a year, or two years, or five years, would be obviously imprudent.

Now, whether it is prudent or imprudent, wise or unwise, to cripple your resources and incur extreme discomfort and inconvenience for the sake of somebody else is a question which every man must answer in accordance with his own ideas, and which, of course, depends very much upon the further question of who somebody else may be. That Matthew, in deciding, towards the small hours of the morning, to make a great sacrifice for the sake of Leonard Jerome, showed himself exceptionally foolish as well as exceptionally generous his biographer, for one, is not concerned to deny; but he did so decide, and having made up his mind, he cheerfully went to sleep. He was fond of Leonard, whom he had always regarded as being to a large extent the victim of circumstances; he could not help believing that the woman whom he had once loved had been chiefly to blame for the embarrassments of which he had been told; he guessed that something worse than a pecuniary catastrophe might be the result of his refusal to assist the improvident couple; and, after all, does not a lonely man get more personal satisfaction out of promoting the happiness of others than out of surrounding himself with luxuries which there is nobody to share?

The upshot of these nocturnal reflections was that at an early hour the next morning Matthew called upon Mr. Robinson, the local house-agent, in order to make a proposition which was instantly and favourably received.

'Oh, dear me, no, sir!—not the smallest difficulty,' Mr. Robinson replied. 'With the place filling up as it is, we don't 'ardly know where to turn for the accommodation we're asked for. There was a party come in on'y yesterday afternoon—Mr. Cohen, a wealthy Jewish gentleman—as I believe your 'ouse would just suit. Invalid lady, no children, what I should term desirable tenants in all respects. I understand as he would bind himself for three months certain, and leavin' of the 'ouse, as you propose to do, sir, with plate, linen and servants, I shouldn't 'esitate for to ask fifteen guineas a week. I 'ope this don't mean we're going to lose you, though, Mr. Austin.'

'No; but for various reasons I think of taking lodgings for

the rest of the winter,' answered Matthew; and, after having given permission for Mr. Cohen to 'view the premises' in the course of the afternoon, he went his way.

Within an hour from the time of his return home that evening the whole transaction had been completed. Mr. Cohen had come, had seen and had been conquered; the lamentations and the amazed queries of the servants had been dealt with; nothing remained to be done, except to pack up. So simply and speedily can the greatest changes be effected by one who knows his own mind and has only himself to consult.

But when Leonard, looking half-expectant, half apprehensive, made his appearance, not a word was said to him upon the subject of the proposed flitting. It is not customary, on making a present, to state the exact price thereof to the recipient, nor had Matthew any inclination to confess how his heart sank at the thought of parting with his privacy, his snug library, his books, his pictures and the garden that he loved. *Linquenda domus!* a persistent voice had been whispering in his ear all day; though he had chosen to speak to the house-agent and the servants of vacating his present quarters for a few months only, he knew very well that his chances of returning thither in the spring were but small. Heedless as he was in matters of domestic economy, he had a horror of debt and greatly preferred being uncomfortable to living beyond his means. At the same time, he thoroughly disliked being uncomfortable; besides which, he had grown attached to the pretty old house which he hardly expected ever to inhabit again. However, it would have been the extremity of bad taste to impart these melancholy anticipations to Leonard, whose gratitude was voluble and who wished most particularly to be assured that he was not subjecting his preserver to even a temporary pinch.

'It's all right, my dear fellow,' Matthew declared; 'I would do a great deal more than this for you, if I could. Only, since you are pleased to consider yourself beholden to me, I will ask two small favours of you, by way of return.'

'As many as you like!' answered Leonard generously.

'I'll limit myself to two. The first is that you will have patience with your uncle, who is trying, I admit, but who is fond of you at the bottom of his heart; the second is that you won't treat your wife with a show of indifference. If I know anything of her—but perhaps you will say that I don't know much—she

has very strong affections, and it would be better both for her and for you that she should be scolded than that she should be allowed to think you didn't care what she did. Now I have been impatient enough and I will say no more.'

Leonard shrugged his shoulders. 'I can easily promise to be patient with Uncle Richard,' he answered; 'to the best of my knowledge and belief, I have never been anything else. As for Lil—well, you may know her better than I do, but she doesn't strike me as being the sort of person who would stand much scolding. I have remonstrated with her once or twice upon the subject of expense, and the result was not encouraging. The fact is that she can't be happy without a grievance, and just now her grievance is that I haven't rent my clothes and heaped dust upon my head because poor old Lady Sara has joined the majority—which is really rather ridiculous. Women often are like that, you know; the only thing to be done with them is to let them alone until they recover themselves.'

Matthew did not like to warn this easy-going husband that when women are denied sympathy in one quarter they are only too apt to seek it in another. It was not his business to stir up conjugal suspicions and dissensions; nor indeed was he acquainted with the rights of the case. He thought, not without reason, that he had done what in him lay to help them both; if he could be of any further use to either of them, he would doubtless be informed of it.

Fortunately for Matthew, it had of late years become no uncommon thing for the Wilverton residents to turn an honest penny by letting their houses during the winter months. It was, to be sure, usual for those who adopted this plan to leave the place on being ousted from their several abodes; still a bachelor really does not require a whole house to himself, while a doctor cannot, of course, take a holiday at the busiest season of the year; so Mrs. Jennings and others had nothing much worse to say about Mr. Austin's removal to Lady Sara's former lodgings in Prospect Place than that the young man's practice was evidently not quite such a lucrative one as some people had seen fit to make out. But Mr. Litton at once smelt a rat.

'What does this mean, Austin?' he asked sharply one day. 'You are not the man to turn yourself out of house and home for the sake of making a miserable little profit of a few guineas a week, and although you may be the sort of man to have lost

money through some silly investment, I shall not believe that you have done that until you tell me that you have. Is it so ?

'Well, since you ask me,' replied Matthew, who congratulated himself upon being able to tell the truth without letting the truth be known, 'I have made an investment which, I am afraid, may involve the loss of the principal. If the worst comes to the worst, I shall not be ruined ; but I thought it prudent to economise, and as I had a good offer for my house I accepted it.'

'H'm!—very laudable, that decision of yours but rather sudden, wasn't it?' asked the old man, staring steadily at the other. 'You seem to have formed it just about the time when I was honoured by a visit from my nephew, who gave me to understand that he also would have to practise economy. He came here with an uncommonly long face, and left with a cheerful one, though he got nothing out of me,' added Mr. Litton, smiling grimly.

'If I were you, I should give him money,' said Matthew, ignoring the unspoken query. 'Why don't you? You have more money than you can spend; you know it is a hard matter for him to pay his way; you mean, I presume, to leave your property to him; yet, instead of giving yourself the satisfaction of being thanked and of seeing other people enjoy themselves, you prefer to make them look forward to your death. It is very bad policy.'

'Oh, he looks forward to my death, does he?'

'It stands to reason that he must; you would look forward to his if your positions were reversed.'

'I suppose I should,' agreed Mr. Litton, with a sigh. He had grown accustomed to Matthew's habit of frank speech, and now rather liked it. 'Well,' he resumed presently, 'anyone who is waiting for my death will not have to wait much longer; the finish is in sight now.'

'I doubt whether you are as ill as you think you are,' Matthew began; 'if you would be advised by me——'

'Not for the world!' interrupted Mr. Litton; 'please allow Jennings to kill me in his own way. My dear friend, wasn't it agreed between us at the outset that you should never be my medical adviser? And don't you know what the consequences are of mentioning one's medical adviser in one's will? I may want to leave you a trifle; and in point of fact, I believe I shall—particularly now that I have heard of this unfortunate investment of yours.'

'It wasn't exactly medical advice that I was going to offer you,' answered Matthew, laughing. 'As for mentioning me in your will, it is very kind and good of you to contemplate that; but I can say truthfully that I would rather have your society than any legacy. You called me your dear friend just now. That was a way of speaking, of course; still, we really are friends, and I don't think either you or I have so many friends in the world that we can afford to lose one.'

'Ah, well, you will have to get on as best you can without me soon, and a modest legacy may help you to bear up under the affliction,' returned Mr. Litton, who was probably a little touched and therefore spoke the more drily. 'Rubbish about your having few friends! I never met a man who had more of them. I am very nearly, if not totally, friendless, I admit; but I have only myself to thank for that. The truth is that I have always known my fellow-mortals too well to make—"unfortunate investments" was the term that we selected, I think.'

It was little enough that the poor old hermit knew about his fellow-mortals; but, like the generality of us, he plumed himself upon what he did not possess, and it would have been a difficult task to persuade him that his judgment had been at fault with regard to his nephew. Matthew made no further effort in that direction, being indeed thankful to be spared awkward questions, and he noted with satisfaction that Mr. Litton had not denied the intention imputed to him of constituting Leonard his heir.

It was not long after this that, dropping in at the local pastry-cook's one day to swallow a hasty luncheon (for the landlady in Prospect Place had told him plainly that she could not put up with irregular hours) he was hailed by a couple of fresh young voices, and turned round to shake the extended hands of Dick and Maggie Frere, who were seated at a little round table, with hot jelly and buns before them. Dick had 'gone into tails,' and was quite a young man; so he thought it necessary to explain that he was treating his sister, whose juvenile taste for sweet things remained unimpaired. A recriminatory wrangle followed; after which Matthew, who did not feel quite equal to hot jelly, but declared himself capable of eating buns against anybody, drew up a chair between his young friends and inquired how they all were at home.

'Oh, there has been a nice row in the house!' answered Dick, with his mouth full. 'What do you think of Anne's having

refused old Baxendale? Don't make faces at me, Maggie; you ain't good-looking enough to play tricks with your features, and the mater would have told Mr. Austin all about it if I hadn't. Yes; the old boy proposed the other day, but she said it wasn't good enough, and, as you may imagine, her papa and mamma ain't best pleased with her. I'm not sure, you know,' continued Dick judicially, 'that, if I were Anne, I should be particularly keen about marrying a grey-headed old chap like Baxendale; still, she ought to consider her family, and, as the governor says, she needn't have raised our hopes all this time if she didn't mean business. No better covert-shooting in England, you know, unless it's in Norfolk.'

'I've said all along,' observed Maggie, 'and I stick to it still, that Anne ought to have married Mr. Austin.'

'How could she, you great silly, when he never asked her? Besides, what this family wants is hard cash. We ain't proud; we wouldn't turn up our noses at a retired pork-butcher now, if he had ten or twelve thousand a year to offer. However, there's no shutting our eyes to the fact that our dear Anne is no longer as young as she was. We shall soon have to look to you for salvation, Maggie.'

'I'm not going to marry a pork-butcher; and if I did, I wouldn't give anything to a lazy boy like you, except a pound of sausages every now and then to stop his mouth,' returned Maggie. 'As soon as I am old enough I mean to propose to Mr. Austin: that will be the next best thing to having him for a brother-in-law.'

'Let us regard the matter as settled, then, subject to the approval of your parents,' said Matthew. 'Any reparation that I can make for having disappointed you by failing to marry your sister——'

He stopped short in the middle of his sentence, looking extremely foolish; for Anne herself had stepped quietly into the shop while he had been speaking, and now stood at his elbow. She could not possibly have helped overhearing his ill-timed jocularly, nor could he do anything except stare at her in mute consternation. Dick and Maggie burst out into shouts of unfeeling laughter at the sight of their friend's discomfiture; but Anne's countenance betrayed neither anger nor amusement.

'Are you encouraging these young wretches to ruin their digestions?' she asked. 'What an unprincipled thing for a doctor



to do! I thought I should find them here, and I have come to carry them off home at once. How much unwholesome food have you managed to consume between you, Dick?’

‘Impossible to say, upon the spur of the moment,’ answered Dick composedly; ‘Maggie is such a rapid feeder. But if you will give me ten shillings, my dear, you shall have sixpence change and I’ll undertake to pay all expenses.’

There was a little friendly dispute over the payment of the bill, during which Matthew, who insisted upon standing treat for the whole party, recovered his equanimity to some extent; but when he found himself out in the street with Anne, the others having rushed off to look on at an incipient dog-fight, he began to feel uncomfortable again. Nor was her first remark of a nature to set him more at his ease.

‘I really think you ought to be ashamed of yourself,’ she said.

‘Because of that nonsense that you heard me talking just now? I am very sorry; but I assure you it was only the feeblest of feeble jokes, and I should never——’

‘Oh, I know,’ she interrupted. ‘I guessed at once what they had been telling you, and it never occurred to me for a moment to feel annoyed with you for answering Maggie according to her folly. What does make me feel annoyed with you is your having given up your pretty house and gone into stuffy lodgings in order to provide Mr. Jerome with ready money which he will only squander. Why should it be more generous to do such things than to give half-a-crown to a tipsy loafer? And we are always being told how immoral it is to do that.’

‘But I can’t admit that I have done anything of the sort,’ said Matthew, to whom this unexpected scolding was not altogether disagreeable.

‘Of course you can’t; still there is no doubt that you have done it. I have heard from Spencer, who knows how to put two and two together and who perfectly understands why the Jeromes, who were upon the brink of ruin, have been able to make themselves comfortable in London again. If they were worth it, I could keep my patience with you; but since they are not, and since you must be aware that they are not——’

‘Does one stop to consider whether a drowning man’s life is worth saving before one jumps into the water?’ asked Matthew.

‘You do admit having dragged Mr. Jerome out by the hair, then? And do you suppose that he will ever thank you? I

always told you that Spencer was not worth much ; but I do think he is worth a good deal more than Mr. Jerome. At least, he was and is grateful.'

'Besides which, he promptly repaid me. Even if it were the case that I had advanced money to Jerome and had had to let my house for a time in consequence, I should be repaid in one form or another, and the sacrifice wouldn't be such a tremendous one as you imagine. It is my misfortune to be for ever appearing abnormally unselfish when I am simply gratifying my own tastes in my own way.'

'It would be impossible to convince me of that,' answered Anne, shaking her head. 'I know what it is to attempt self-sacrifice for the sake of others, and, as you have heard from the children, I know what it is to break down disgracefully at the last moment. Perhaps that is what makes me find you so exasperating. I was half inclined to read Spencer's letter to you ; but I had better not. Since it makes no difference to you whether people are good or bad, grateful or ungrateful, you would hardly be influenced by anything that he might have to say about your friends. Only I do trust that you won't let them reduce you to beggary.'

'I certainly won't do that,' answered Matthew, laughing. 'Meanwhile, please do not allow it to be supposed that there is the slightest ground for what you have been assuming as a fact.'

'Oh, nobody in the place, except myself, suspects the truth, if that is what you mean, and nobody will be told by me. I like you too much to exhibit you in the light of—well, in the light in which ninety-nine people out of a hundred would regard your conduct.'

Maggie and Dick returning at this moment in a high state of excitement, after having assisted in dragging the two pugnacious dogs apart, nothing further could be added, and Matthew had no opportunity of telling Miss Frere how glad he had been to hear that she had held out against the fascinations of Sir William Baxendale. But he went his way feeling more cheerful than he had done for a long time past. Anne, to be sure, had not been complimentary ; but she had spoken frankly and like a friend—which was more than she had done since his first somewhat unsuccessful efforts to befriend her.

*(To be continued.)*

# THE CORNHILL MAGAZINE.

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OCTOBER 1894.

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